



Evaluation of The Bay: A Blueprint for Recovery

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The Wildlife Trust for
**Lancashire
Manchester &
North Merseyside**



Cumbria
Wildlife Trust



Lancashire &
South Cumbria
NHS Foundation Trust

eden project



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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the 43 people who contributed to this research, and in particular thank The Bay's staff for their willingness to engage with, and respond to, our queries throughout the process.

Executive Summary

Background

The Bay: A Blueprint for Recovery is a multi-agency partnership between The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, The Eden Project, and Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust. It aims to reduce loneliness and isolation in Morecambe Bay's communities while also delivering ecological benefits. The project secured £880,000 from the People's Postcode Lottery for September 2021 to August 2023. All data in this report covers the period to the end of April 2023.

The Bay is a multi-level project, with four levels of work:

- Specialist nature and wellbeing groups for people experiencing social exclusion and isolation, taking green social prescription (GSP) referrals from the NHS and community groups, as well as self-referrals.
- Targeted community engagement for people at risk of social exclusion and isolation, through public events such as strandline hunts and beach cleans.
- Whole population work which aims to increase the number of people interacting with nature and taking action for nature.
- Business development to test commercial ideas for generating income, and to share the project's learnings with other coastal communities.

It is also a multi-site project, with delivery staff located around Morecambe Bay in three hubs at Barrow, Morecambe and Wyre.

Research aims and methods

The evaluation has been carried out by Lancaster University, with the themes of:

- What has worked well in delivering the programme?
- What have the main challenges been?
- What could be improved, and how?
- What are the key learning points for establishing similar programmes?

We analysed a wide range of data that had been recorded by project staff and undertook research with 43 people through five focus groups, five group interviews, one individual interview and four online feedback forms.

We note that none of the data is from a representative sample, so the analysis is indicative only.

Although it remains The Bay's responsibility to produce and share its blueprint, this evaluation can contribute significantly to that process, and we have added 'blueprint top tips' gleaned from the research throughout this report.

Evaluation findings

Project outputs and outcomes

As depicted overleaf, the data strongly indicates that participating in both the specialised sessions and targeted events enables most people to meet each aspect of the five ways to wellbeing:



Specialised sessions	88% met new people	95% have become more active	95% noticed something new	98% learned something new	86% had given something back
Targeted events	90% met new people	100% were out and active at the event	9.5 out of 10 engagement with nature	99% learned something new	95% inspired to take action for nature

Specialist nature and wellbeing groups:

- ✓ The Bay is successfully engaging with people in the lowest 15% of the population regarding mental wellbeing.
- ✓ Taking part in the project is associated with significant improvements in wellbeing.

For all referrals to the specialist sessions up to the end of April 2023 we found that 29% did not go on to attend any sessions, in line with nationally observed patterns in green social prescribing (DHSC, 2023a). A rising rate of referrals in recent months suggests that the project will meet its two-year target of 432 people most impacted by social exclusion and isolation going to nature and wellbeing sessions, and therefore ‘engaged in regular positive activity, feeling happier and better connected’. We note that a pro rata target for Year 1 would not have been met, pointing to the need for long term commitment versus short project work for social prescribing programmes aiming to reach communities via referral pathways.

Targeted engagement through community events:

- ✓ The project has engaged 9,380 people, which is twice as many as planned, using an interesting variety of events.
- ✓ 60% of participants who gave feedback had not attended a similar event previously; extrapolated this suggests The Bay may have brought around 5,600 people into new engagement with nature.
- ✓ The average rating for enjoyment of the in-person events was 9.5 out of 10.
- ✓ 99% of respondents said they would like to attend another event.

Whole population work:

- ✓ The project has established an attractive, informative and up-to-date website, with mean page views per quarter of 8,770.

- ✓ The site features some 'self-service' information for learning about local wildlife and local habitats, and 13 downloadable resources, including how to make a bee hotel, and nature identification and beach bingo sheets.
- ✓ It has built a good social media presence; Facebook predominates with a mean reach of 23,574 people per month, 2,152 followers, and an engagement rate of 20%.
- ✓ It has made and posted 14 videos on its YouTube channel.

The project's planned 'whole population' outcome was to have 3,000 wider community individuals engaged in positive nature activities, but, although we can see signs of engagement, we have no way of knowing how many actions for nature have been undertaken, nor by how many individuals. This is a gap that the project's managers are aware of, with self-reporting tools now being designed and implemented.

Business development: the project has met its target of designing and testing three business development opportunities to generate income, although it is too soon to assess their success. It has also, as planned, maintained its involvement with The Eden Project Morecambe, and submitted several funding applications to try and secure the medium-term continuation of the project.

Benefits to nature: The project has undertaken 284 different activities to benefit nature through its nature and wellbeing events and community engagement events; it may also have inspired many more. The actions for nature seem to be an important component of The Bay's offer in terms of creating positive emotions among participants, and therefore encouraging people to attend sessions and events, and to form an active sense of agency and connection to nature.

Project processes

Specialist nature and wellbeing sessions: feedback about The Bay's staff and how they run the sessions was extremely positive. The main challenge has been time involved in developing referral pathways across the wider NHS and community partnerships; staff have had to invest a lot of time in promoting The Bay's offer to social prescribers, who themselves spend a lot of time attempting to keep up with what opportunities exist for their clients. Referrals to the project have been on an upward trend in recent months but developing and maintaining referral pathways will be an on-going process.

Targeted engagement events: most participants heard about The Bay's event through Facebook. They highly rated the staff and volunteers, event location and content of the event. Feedback from event volunteers was also positive about the events and local staff, but they requested a more strategic approach to informing, involving and managing volunteers.

'Whole population': project managers were pleased that, with appropriate training and guidance, The Bay's staff have embraced their use of social media as part of their jobs. This work was led by a part-time Communications Officer who created the project's website, managed its social media, managed communications across the partnership and contributed to marketing the project and its business elements.

Business development: this element was undermined by being unable to recruit a full-time Business Development Manager, despite two rounds of recruitment. To the project's credit staff and partners took on most of the post's roles, although with less intensity than would be possible with a dedicated staff member.

Project innovations

One of the project's innovations is to deliver its wellbeing activities around the coast, making them 'blue-green' rather than just green social prescriptions. Project staff appreciated having access to a variety of 'blue' coastal habitats for their work and many people spoke of being fortunate to live near Morecambe Bay. The desire to 'open people's eyes to what's on their doorstep' was a recurrent theme.

The project is also multi-agency, multi-site and multi-level. All three elements appear to be strengths. As a multi-agency initiative, it benefits from the four partners' different skills and experience, from better funding opportunities, and improved delivery through working with relevant local partners. As a multi-site project, it is delivering work which combats isolation and ill health right around Morecambe Bay, to a footprint that fits with the local NHS trust's area. And as a multi-level project it is providing more holistic support to a greater range of people, and with more benefits to people and nature, than projects which focus only on specialised work with small groups.

Discussion and suggestions

Green social prescribing

The project is facing the same challenges as other UK green social prescribing projects, as set out in recent UK government research (DHSC, 2023b). These include issues concerning funding, and knowledge about green social prescribing among health sector workers and the public. It is also working in a complex context of many environmental and community groups, and GSP-relevant services, which lacks coordination and a single effective searchable platform.

Project staff have invested a lot of time in creating referral pathways, particularly from NHS employees, and 26% of referrals are from or related to the local trust. 50% are self-referrals (some of which may have been prompted by a referral partner), and half of those come via The Bay's social media, its events and word of mouth. Tactically there is a question about whether to focus on a particular pathway and if so which one. Informed by recent research into referral patterns among clinicians and their receptiveness towards GSP (DHSC, 2023a), the project might want to focus on those people who have already referred, those who seem most interested, and those who themselves opt to spend time outdoors. The Bay could also systematise giving feedback to referrers to increase referral frequency. It may also want to learn about self-referrals and the gap that The Bay is filling and why. The project has capacity to involve more people in its nature and wellbeing groups, but faces the challenge of having to continue to seek more referrals, while also running sessions and supporting attendance and 'successful' exits. For the latter we suggest a first step of reviewing the data which is now available and holding a workshop so staff can discuss ideas to increase attendance and retention, and to commit to testing a few 'do-able' strategies.

Monitoring and evaluation

The project has recorded a good deal of data but is only now starting to understand and analyse it. In Section 4.2 we suggest various ways of making the project's existing monitoring more useful, including modifying some elements, and establishing a system to generate useful information about referrals, progression and exit routes.

Volunteering

Part of The Bay's five-year vision in the funding proposal was to have *a resilient volunteer network and people with 'lived experience' involved in the long-term running of the programme*. After just 19 months

each hub has former participants of the nature and wellbeing sessions now working each week as peer support volunteers in those sessions, and local groups of volunteers who help run community events on an ad hoc basis.

The community engagement volunteers who attended our focus group (which, we note, did not include any people from the Wyre hub) were positive about the project and its staff, but wanted to be kept more informed about the wider project, and to have the opportunity to be more involved. (We note that other volunteers who were not at the focus group might feel differently; for example, some might prefer simply to sign up for an event, turn up to help, and then go home without further responsibility, or need for any more training or affirmation.) Partly in response to this The Bay has recently established quarterly skills and development days, and held the first one in June 2023, where volunteers and staff meet for training and to discuss the project's direction.

The role of volunteers to date and in the next phase of the project will be one of the themes for reflection and planning at the end of The Bay's first two years. The project staff have successfully garnered the support and enthusiasm of volunteers who are already an asset to the project, and it will be a priority to see how they can build on that good will and energy in the future.

Conclusion

The Bay is an ambitious multi-agency, multi-site and multi-level project which has achieved a lot in just 19 months. It is doing important work, and doing it well. While there are aspects to be improved upon, and there is more to learn, it has harnessed the support of local people as volunteers, established itself as a reliable and useful service for the delivery of green social prescriptions, and engaged large numbers of people with their local environment and in actions for nature. We look forward to seeing its further development, both building on its successes and sharing lessons with other coastal communities, for the benefit of people and nature.

1. Background

The Bay: A Blueprint for Recovery is a partnership between four organisations: The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside (LWT); Cumbria Wildlife Trust (CWT); The Eden Project; and Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust (LSCFT).

In April 2021 the partners secured £880,000 from the People's Postcode Lottery's Postcode Recovery Fund, provided to help communities recover from problems exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The project aims to reduce loneliness and isolation in Morecambe Bay's communities while also delivering ecological benefits, and the funding was for two years from September 2021. This evaluation, led by Lancaster University, supports the project's aim of learning from project implementation and its plan to share lessons with other coastal communities in the form of a replicable blueprint.

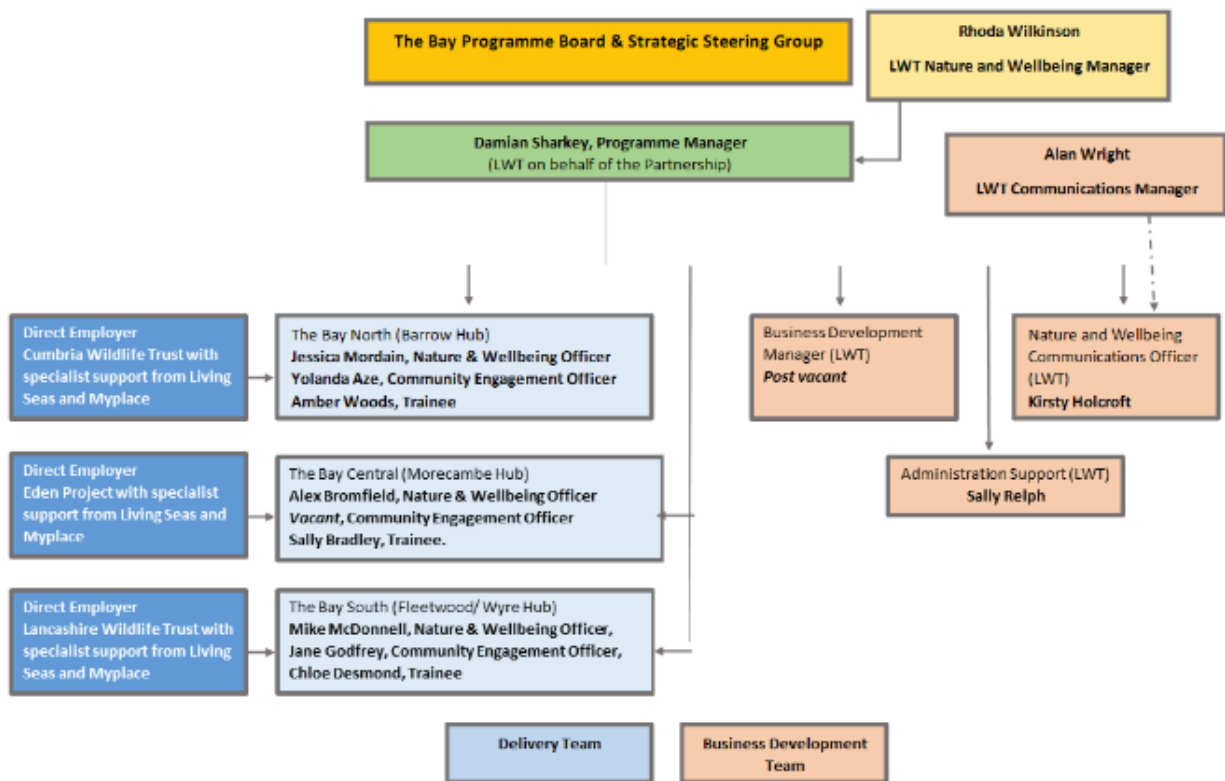
The project aims to benefit both people and nature by running specialist wellbeing sessions, community events and providing resources and communications to get people outdoors and connecting with nature through a wide variety of conservation, exploration and creative activities. Its design was informed by two existing projects: Lancashire Wildlife Trust's [Myplace wellbeing programme](#) (a person-centred approach delivering ecotherapy to individuals), and the Wildlife Trusts' [Living Seas programme](#), focusing on coastal conservation through public engagement. It also aimed to capitalise on the momentum around the creation of Eden Project North (now called Eden Project Morecambe), and to work with the NHS' LSCFT as a key mental health provider across the delivery area. Guiding its work are the five ways to wellbeing (see **Section 1.3**). It operates from three hubs around Morecambe Bay:



The funding covered the period September 2021 to August 2023. During that period it also won small amounts of additional funding¹ which, combined with some underspends, have enabled managers to extend staff contracts (excluding Trainees' contracts) until June 2024.

1.1 Project structure

The following organogram shows the project's structure and staffing as of June 2023. We have retained staff members' names in the organogram because the Project Officers and Trainees were mentioned by name frequently (and always positively) in the focus groups; the project takes a person-centred approach, and its people and their connections are at the heart of its delivery. Not shown on the organogram are the first year's Trainees (Holly Stainton, Megan Jones and Carol Driver) and Deborah Woods, who was in post as the Morecambe hub's Community Engagement Officer until February 2023.

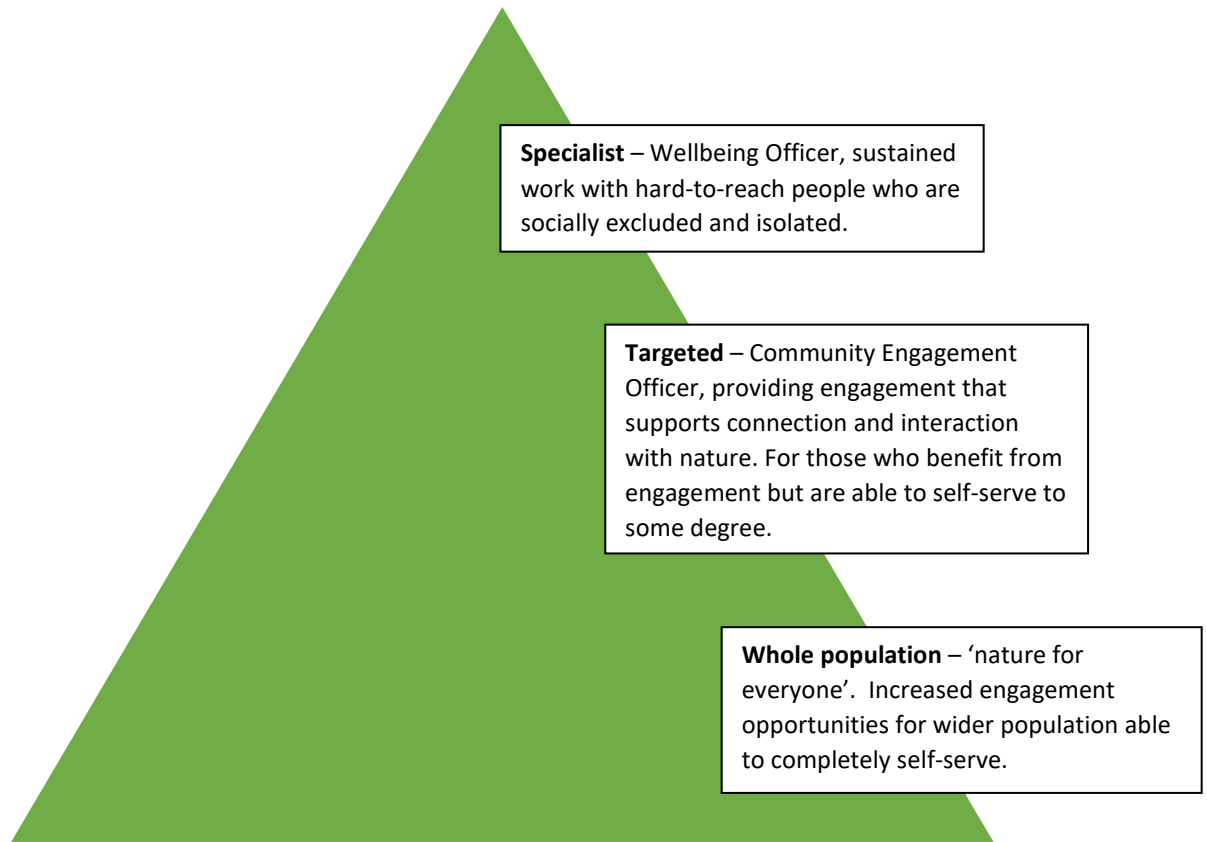


Project delivery, shown in blue on the organogram, is from three hubs, one each in the north, middle and south of Morecambe Bay. That delivery is supported by staff responsible for business development and communications, shown in pink. Three of the four partners (the exception being the NHS) act as direct employers of staff. The delivery team and Programme Manager work full time, all remaining staff work part time on the project. The traineeships are paid 12-month posts to help programme delivery

¹ These include (a) a grant to support people struggling with the cost of living crisis by bringing people together for foraging and outdoor cooking activities and, importantly, sharing a hot meal in a communal and positive learning environment (b) developing an engagement programme with a local dementia group and (c) involvement in The Eden Project's Nature Connection project which will explore both pathways in and exit routes out of social prescribing using different models in three locations (Morecambe Bay, Cornwall and Berkshire).

and to create employment routes into the sector. Note that, despite two rounds of recruitment, the post of Business Development Manager was not filled.

The project uses three strategies to reach out to people, as depicted here:

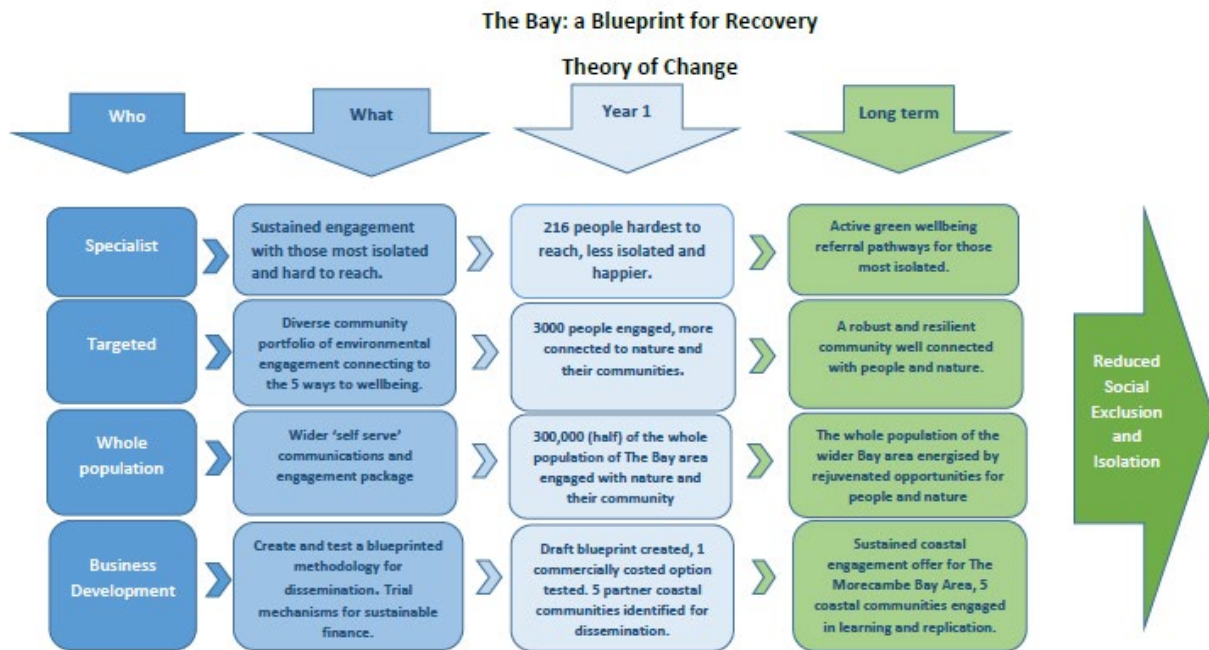


The ‘Specialist’ person-centred level focuses on those suffering from, or at risk of, the impacts of social exclusion and isolation. It takes referrals from the NHS and other partners, as well as people making direct contact with the project who would not necessarily receive a clinical referral. Participants receive up to around 12 sessions of support, working in small groups, and engaging in activities such as nature walks, species identification, mindfulness, conservation, food growing, and bush craft. It is not a clinical intervention but uses small group work to help people to move out of their isolation and to connect with nature and community.

The ‘Targeted’ intervention aims to engage people at risk of social exclusion and isolation through community events such as strandline hunts, sea watches, shore searches, beach cleans, and coastal art. Compared to the small group participants these people will often be more able to ‘self-serve’ and attend bigger events with people they have not met before. Some may also prefer the ability to drop in and out to activities that particularly interest them, rather than committing to attending a small group regularly. They still benefit, though, from some connectivity with staff and volunteers for inspiration and support.

The 'Whole population' level aims to increase the number of people interacting with nature and taking action for nature without any direct contact with team members. This level shares information and ideas to encourage and inspire wider populations to become more active in their environment both for their own wellbeing, and for nature.

The fourth level of work, as depicted below, is business development, with the aim of testing ways of generating income and sharing lessons learned with other coastal communities.



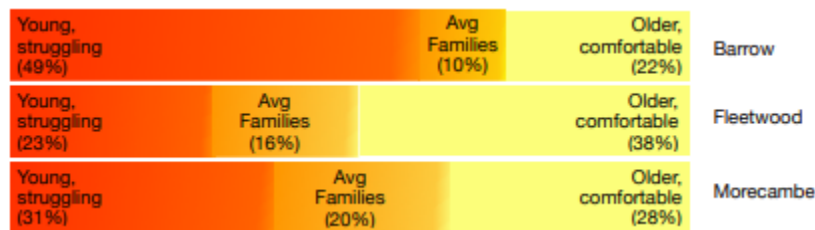
1.2 Project context

In 2021 Lancaster University's Future Places Centre undertook desk-based research to compare sociodemographic and wellbeing data by postcode for Barrow, Morecambe and Fleetwood (Hollinshead & Harper, 2021)².

Using the Acorn sociodemographic classification system, they grouped 77% to 81% of the areas in each town into three categories situated along a continuum: at one end, young, struggling individuals, couples and families, and at the other, older, more financially stable couples or empty-nesters. In between are the 'average' families and couples who are best described as 'comfortable' but not 'affluent', 'careful' with money, but not 'struggling'.

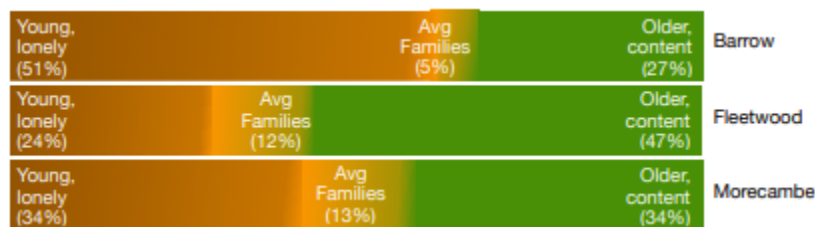
² We have followed The Bay's use of 'Wyre' to refer to their southern hub, as they do work across the borough, but much of their work is within the coastal area of Fleetwood Town Council, which Hollinshead & Harper refer to as 'Fleetwood'.

Morecambe is evenly split across the two extremes ('struggling' or 'affluent') whereas Fleetwood shows a 1:2 split weighted towards to the financially stable types and Barrow shows a 2:1 split weighted towards the younger, struggling types, as illustrated here:



The wellbeing data used combined proxies for isolation and loneliness (self-reported instances or judgements of interaction with neighbourhoods and community groups) with information about the likelihood of mental health problems (including self-reported levels of feeling joy, unhappiness, and self-confidence). It also used data about behavioural attitudes towards diet, smoking, drinking and exercise.

The researchers again derived characteristics from the data, which cover 81% to 83% of the town's areas. At one end of the spectrum are the younger, struggling couples or one-parent families, with a greater likelihood of poor mental health, isolation and depression, compared to older, retired couples at the other end, who may be suffering from age-related illness but who generally have good mental health. The middle ground is made up of the 'average' family, who feel they are 'doing alright', are less inclined to suffer from poor mental health or feelings of isolation. The following table shows the percentage distribution of the main wellbeing characteristics across the three areas. Barrow, again, shows a 2:1 split weighted towards the younger, struggling groups, with Fleetwood reversing that ratio and Morecambe evenly distributed between the two.



The researchers noted that although there are differences, each town has a section of the population that is younger and at risk of poor mental health, feelings of isolation and loneliness. They tend to be living around the middle of the towns, and towards the coastline side. Moving outside of those areas (inland for Barrow and Fleetwood, east and west along the coast for Morecambe), the residents are generally older, more settled and content, with higher neighbourhood involvement and less likelihood of isolation. We note that within those more affluent areas with typically higher levels of wellbeing there will still be individuals experiencing isolation and exclusion.

For further information see the Hollinshead & Harper report's appendices, which provide a detailed map for each town showing the spatial distribution of all 18 Acorn sociodemographic categories, plus the proportions in each of the 26 Acorn wellbeing categories.

1.3 Research context

One influence on policy making for mental health is the ‘five ways to wellbeing’. They are a set of five evidence-based public mental health messages aimed at improving the mental health and wellbeing of the whole population³.



Of great significance to The Bay is the recent investment in social prescribing. It attempts to connect individuals to activities, groups, and services which can help meet the practical, social and emotional needs that affect their health and wellbeing. It is driven by a wellness agenda rather than disease management (Health Education England, undated). Rather than expecting people to take up the five ways to wellbeing by themselves, social prescribers refer people to groups that can support them to do so. Social prescribers work within NHS primary care networks, which have recently been tasked with proactively offering social prescribing to populations experiencing health inequalities (NHS England, 2023). Some charities and social care services also have social prescribers. NHS England states that although social prescribing can be used with anyone, it is particularly suitable for people who:

- have one or more long term conditions;
- need support with low level mental health issues;
- are lonely or isolated;
- have complex social needs which affect their wellbeing.

The term ‘green social prescribing’ (GSP) refers to efforts to link people to nature-based interventions and activities, such as local walking for health schemes, community gardening and food-growing projects (NHS England, undated). The less-used ‘blue social prescribing’ refers to activities on or by water. There is an extensive body of research showing the positive impacts that contact with nature has on human health, and in particular mental health (e.g. Coventry et al, 2021; Fullam et al, 2021; Gascon, et al, 2017; Hartig et al, 2014; Keniger et al 2013; White et al, 2021). Key national and international bodies have accepted, reviewed, synthesised and added to this (e.g. the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2021), the European Commission (ten Brink et al, 2016), the UK Government (Lovell et al, 2018), and Natural England (Lovell et al, 2020)). There has also been increased research into the effects of access to nature and green and blue spaces on social isolation and loneliness as a result of Covid (e.g. Ugolini et al (2020), Astell-Burt et al (2022); Chaudhury and Banerjee (2020); Reinhardt et al (2021)).

³ The five ways to wellbeing were launched by the New Economics Foundation in 2008 and commissioned by the UK government’s Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing (Government Office for Science, 2008). They are promoted by the NHS and are widely used by organisations such as Mind.

Studies for the entire adult population of England concluded that good health and comparatively improved mental health is more prevalent the closer one lives to the coast (Garrett et al., 2019; Wheeler et al., 2012). They also found that the positive effects of coastal proximity were greater among more socioeconomically deprived communities.

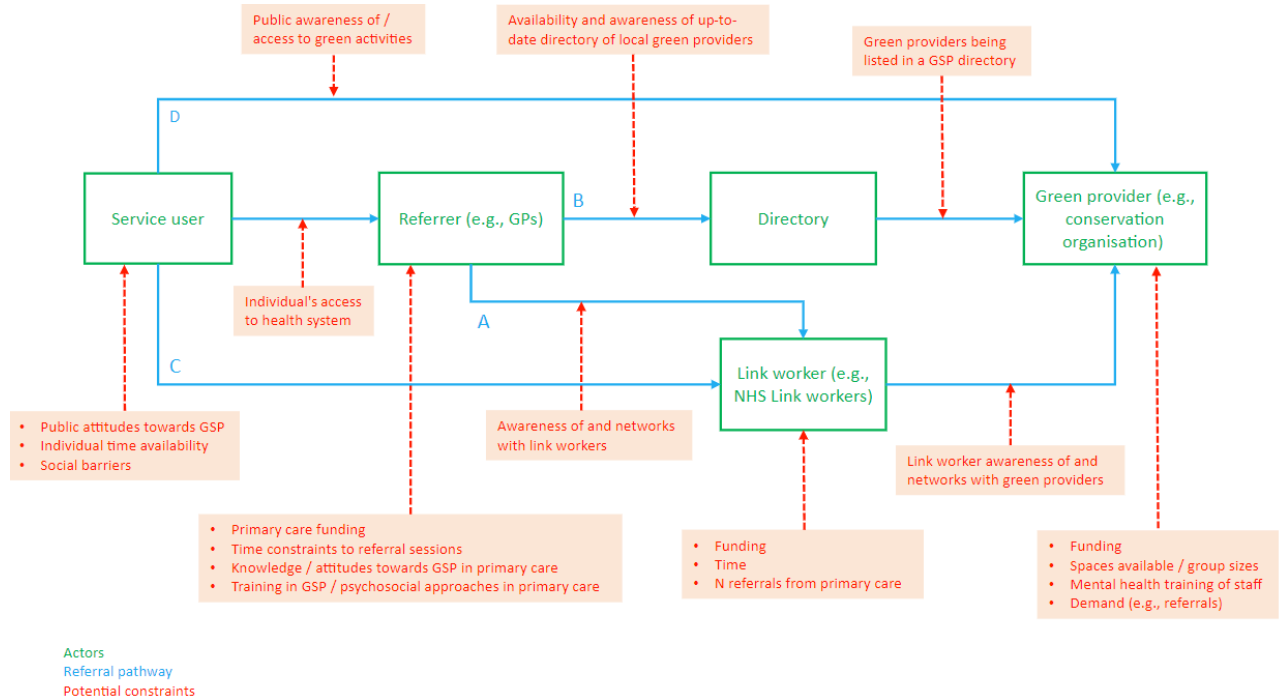
A recent government assessment of capacity to deliver green social prescribing (DHSC, 2023b) provides this framework:

The health benefits of GSP can be understood either as proactive, preventing poor health symptoms from manifesting, or restorative, where targeted activities and services support people with existing health needs. The literature identifies 3 elements of GSP that provide health and other benefits to service users:

- *natural surroundings*
- *meaningful activities*
- *social context*

The Bay’s work is on both sides: proactively working with people at risk of isolation through community engagement events, and providing restorative eco-therapy for people with mental health needs.

However, as this diagram (DHSC, 2023b, Figure 1) which maps pathways linking service users to green providers illustrates, there are many pinch points (shown in red) between each person who can benefit from GSP (‘service user’ in green, on the left) and their accessing the benefits of nature and wellbeing services.



Furthermore, while there is a lot of qualitative evidence suggesting that green social prescribing can have positive impacts on people’s wellbeing, mood and functioning, this is not yet supported by large-scale randomised controlled trials (Garside et al, 2020). This is also true for social prescribing schemes in

general (Bickerdike et al, 2017). Most evaluations of social prescribing focus on the benefits to users of the service, without comparison to treatment that would have been received regardless or otherwise, or consideration of those who ‘drop out’ or decline to take part (Munoz et al, 2020).

The UK Government is currently funding seven green social prescribing ‘test and learn’ sites to test how to embed green social prescribing into communities; its findings should become available later in 2023.

1.4 Report structure

In **Section 2** we share information about the evaluation, including outlining the datasets generated by the project, and new data generated by our research.

The bulk of the report, **Section 3**, sets out the research findings. A summary is included at the start of each of the five sections. We have used a lot of direct quotes from our interviews and focus groups to allow respondents' voices to be heard; we hope they will help readers to understand the project and the evaluation's findings, and that their rich detail is useful for continuing and future projects of this kind. The task of producing a blueprint for other organisations to use is the responsibility of The Bay project and its partners, but we have where possible added ‘blueprint top tips’ gleaned from the research.

In **Section 4** we discuss some of the issues to arise from the research and make some suggestions for future development, before summarising conclusions in **Section 5**.

2. Research aims and methods

Lancaster University staff developed a research proposal which was discussed and modified with project staff and members of *The Bay's* steering group. The agreed aims were to focus on key processes and procedures involved in establishing and running the scheme, while also contributing to evaluation of outcomes and reach by analysing data generated by the project.

The overall themes of inquiry were:

- What has worked well in delivering the programme?
- What have the main challenges been?
- What could be improved, and how?
- What are the key learning points for establishing similar programmes?

2.1 Data generated by the project

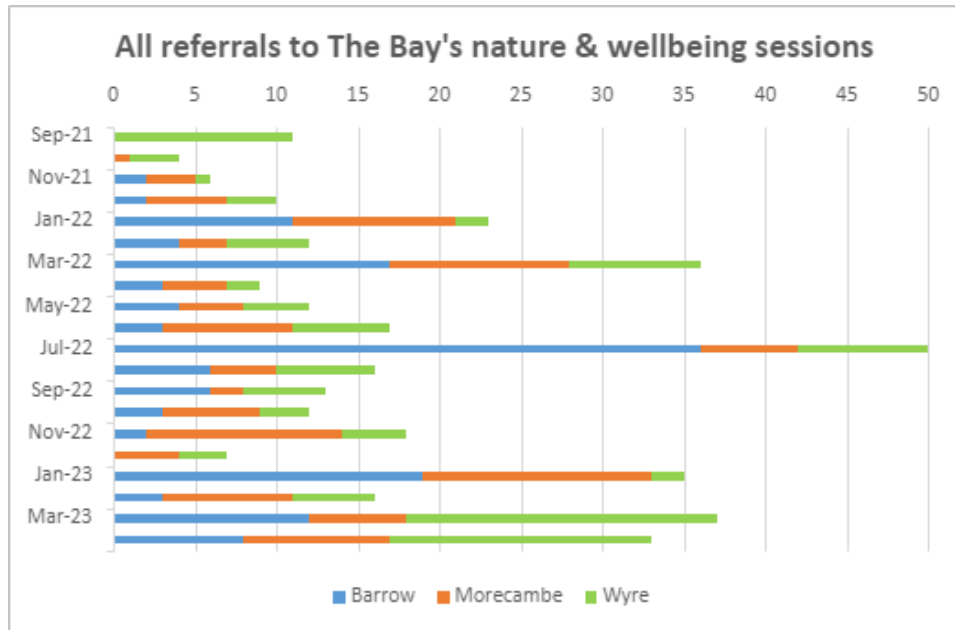
Staff from The Bay and Lancaster University worked together to develop monitoring and evaluation tools for use during the project. This section describes the data gathered by project staff using those tools and their own record-keeping.

2.1.1 Data about the number of referrals to the nature and wellbeing sessions

Project staff record each person referred to The Bay and those booking in without a referral (known in the project as self-referral) for each month.

The following chart summarises the numbers by hub over time. It illustrates how the number of referrals is unpredictable, with the project total, and the referrals by hub, varying a good deal from one month to the next. This is mainly explained by ‘block bookings’, such as one organisation referring 30 people to the Barrow hub in July 2022. The early number of bookings for Wyre, in September 2021, is

due to the Wyre officer being the only person in post (not newly recruited, but moving from the Myplace project) and therefore not having to start from scratch in terms of staff training and making links to referrers. We note that in the latest few months the numbers seem to be settling at a higher rate, a pattern that has continued into May, June and July 2023.



The spread of referrals between the three hubs was almost even, with Barrow at 37% and Morecambe and Wyre at 32% and 31% respectively.

2.1.2 Data about people referred to the nature and wellbeing sessions

Nature & Wellbeing Officers use a customer relationship manager programme called thankQ to track each individual's journey. The software is usually used for tracking memberships, so LWT's Nature and Wellbeing team worked with thankQ to add a wellbeing module to follow each participant's journey. Via thankQ each referred person immediately receives a welcome message with a video from the member of staff who will call them, the phone number they will be contacted on, and information about what to expect. It also helps keep track of users' journeys, and helps ensure GDPR compliance.

In total the project has recorded 403 referrals.

The following chart presents EDI data for those referrals. For each axis of difference it excludes those out of the 403 people for whom we lack data, who were either recorded as 'other', 'not known', 'prefer not to say' or left blank.

Gender	Number	%
Female	174	51%
Male	157	46%
Non-binary	8	2%
Transgender	5	1%
Total	344	100%
Sexuality	Number	%
Heterosexual/straight	230	90%
Bisexual	12	5%
Gay woman/lesbian	7	3%
Gay man	5	2%
Asexual	1	0%
Total	255	100%
Disability	Number	%
No	244	74%
Yes	85	26%
Total	329	100%
Age	Number	%
0 - 17	56	16%
18 - 20	22	6%
21 - 29	57	17%
30 - 39	54	16%
40 - 49	47	14%
50 - 65	73	21%
65 +	32	9%
Total	341	100%

Ethnicity	Number	%
White of British origin	309	91%
White of other origin	11	3%
Asian/Asian British	8	2%
Mixed Asian & White	3	1%
Mixed Black African & White	1	0%
Other mixed	4	1%
Arab	1	0%
Other ethnic group	2	1%
Total	339	100%
Status prior to engaging	Number	%
Unemployed	108	34%
Full-time student (school/FE/HE)	83	26%
Retired	36	11%
Carer	24	7%
Part-time employed	23	7%
Full-time employed	21	7%
Self-employed	10	3%
Full/part-time volunteer	10	3%
Part-time student	3	1%
Apprentice or other vocational training	2	1%
NEET (Not in Employment Education or Training)	1	0%
Total	321	100%

2.1.3 Questionnaire for nature and wellbeing participants

The main feedback tool for the nature and wellbeing sessions is a two-page questionnaire. It contains the seven questions of the [Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well Being Scale](#) (SWEMWBS), plus questions about the project and respondents' experience of the project.

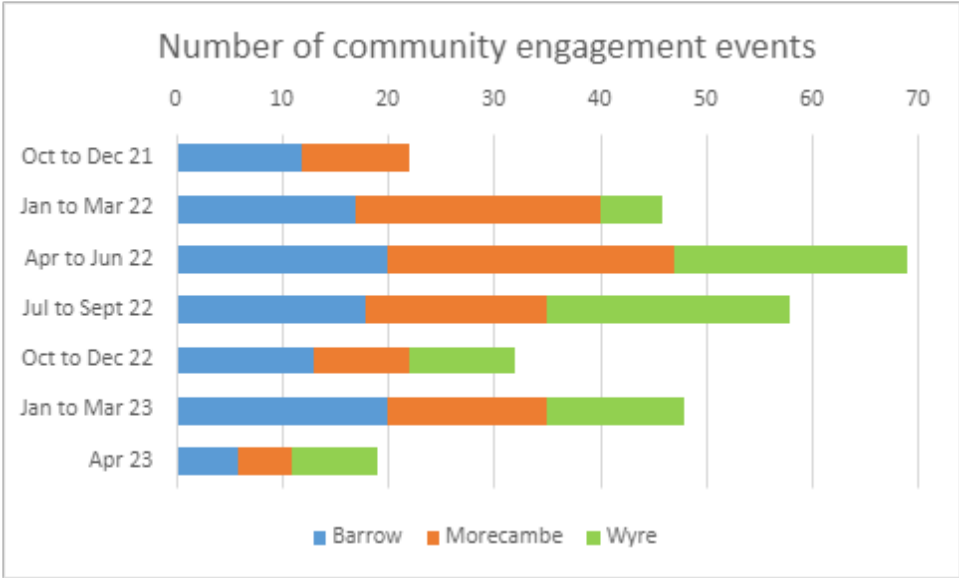
The planned schedule is that each person completes the questionnaire when registering or first joining the project, again after six sessions, and then again after their final (twelfth) session. The project initially emailed the questionnaire to newly referred people but got a very low response rate. It then switched to asking the officers to give paper copies to people for them to complete. However, in practice the officers have found it difficult to get it consistently completed and on the planned schedule. Some participants are unwilling to complete the questionnaire, may not have time after a session, and officers may not remember to 'catch' each person at the correct points in their journey.

We analysed all the data which had been entered by the project on a single spreadsheet. After deleting some duplicates, we were left with 172 questionnaires, among which 72 had been filled once, with the remainder being multiple responses at different journey stages (mostly two rather than three) by the same person.

2.1.4 Records of community engagement events

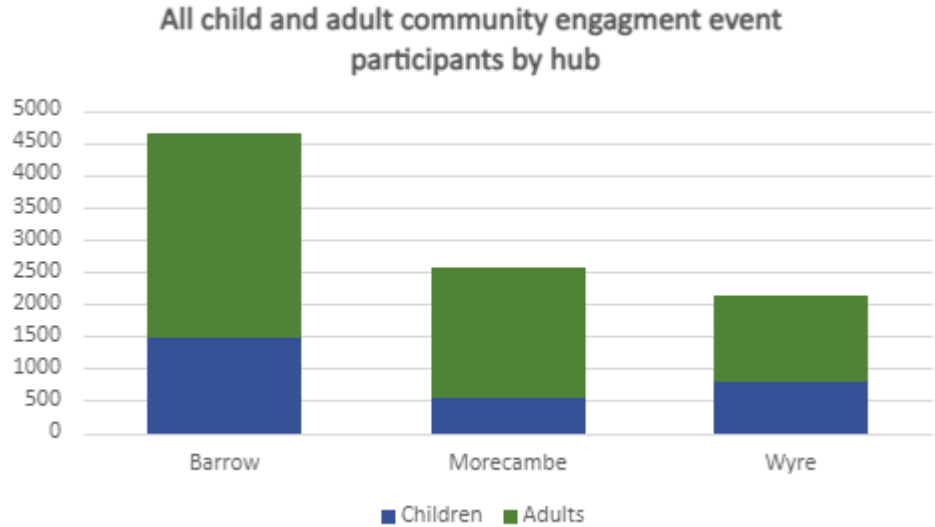
Each Community Engagement Officer records data for their events, including the date, location, type of event, number of participants, and breakdown between adult and child participants. The participant numbers are sometimes estimates, particularly for larger events.

In total between October 2021 and April 2023 the officers recorded 294 events, with Barrow and Morecambe each accounting for 36% of the total and Wyre 28% (note that Wyre’s officer was not in post until January 2022).

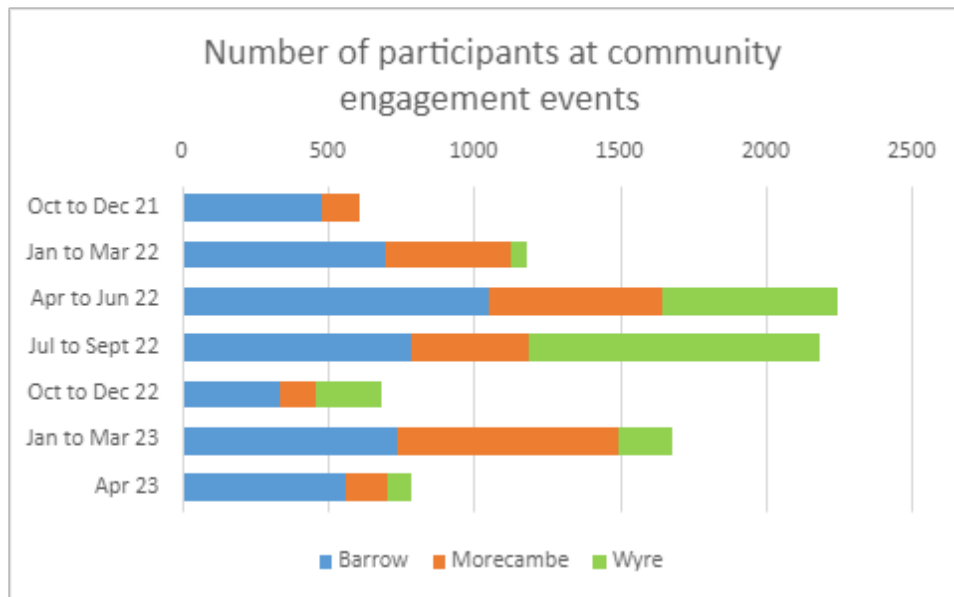


In total the officers recorded an estimated 9,380 participants, with the Barrow hub accounting for half of the total, and Morecambe and Wyre recording 27% and 23% respectively.

Across the three hubs 30% of participants were recorded as being under 18; the proportion of child participants was highest in Wyre (38%) and lowest in Morecambe (22%).



The spread of events and numbers of participants over the year mainly reflects the weather, with greater chance of events being postponed or cancelled in the winter. Numbers are low for October to December 2022 because the Programme Manager took the decision to pause delivery and focus for a quarter on forward planning. The Community Engagement team had been key to the fast pace at which The Bay publicly ‘hit the ground running’ and very quickly developed and began delivery of their events. The pause enabled them to reflect on year 1 and where to focus their efforts for year 2. At their end of year 1 ‘team day’ they identified gaps in general engagement with older males and young people who were under-represented among The Bay’s participants.



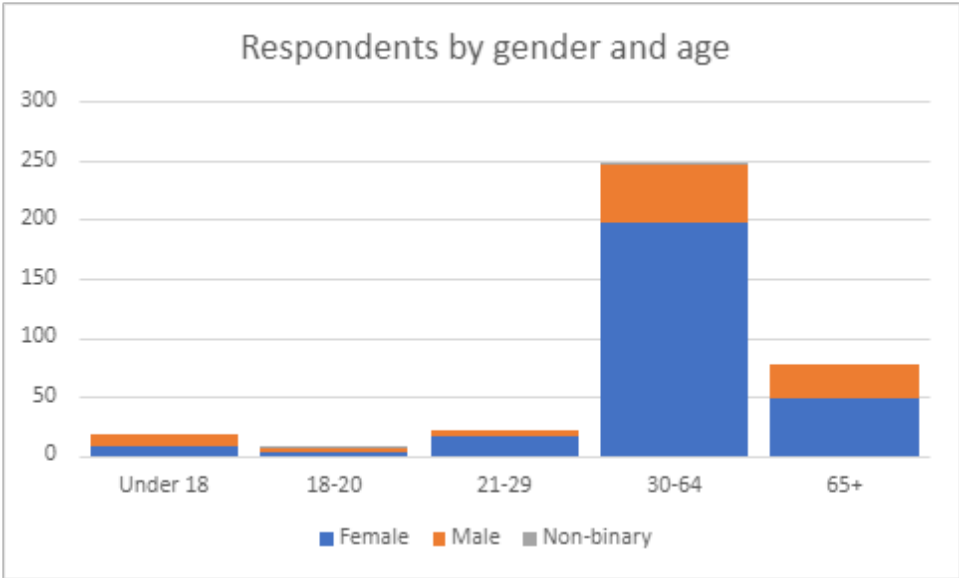
We note that the data does not differentiate between types of community engagement: someone spending a few minutes learning from a portable rockpool is recorded in the same way as someone spending several hours at a beach clean. Furthermore, the post of Community Engagement Officer in Morecambe has been vacant since February 2023. Whilst there have been some beach-based events since then most of Morecambe events have been at their ‘pop up’ shop in Morecambe’s Arndale Centre. The idea is to both provide a physical base for the team (the Morecambe team plus the Programme Manager and Administrator) but also place them at the heart of passing local connections and hosting accessible events such as workshops, FareShare food, and talks by the local naturalist group.

The three hubs have used different ways of recording the contribution of volunteers, so we cannot provide an overview for the whole project. However, the records from Barrow show a list of 34 people, of whom 29 registered as volunteers, and 23 actually volunteered. The Wyre hub’s records show a group of seven volunteers who are actively engaged, and that one or two of those volunteers worked at 28 events out of the total of 82 community engagement events.

2.1.5 Feedback survey of community engagement participants

Project staff handed out paper surveys at the end of some community engagement events. The analysis in this report is from 382 forms: 95 from events in May to August 2022 and – using a modified form – 287 responses from events in August 2022 to the end of April 2023. The updated form used the same format but included eight new questions exploring the effect of the event on participants.

372 respondents indicated both their gender and age. As depicted below, females were in the majority. Unfortunately, the age groups used in the original and updated forms were not compatible, hence the lack of differentiation for ages between 30 and 64.



364 people indicated their ethnicity:

White	96.4%
Asian	2.2%
Black/African/Caribbean	0.5%
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	0.5%
Pacific Islander	0.3%

351 people indicated who they attended the event with; the majority were with children or other family members, but notably, in relation to the project’s aims regarding reducing isolation, just over a quarter came alone:

With young family/children	41%
By myself	26%
With my partner	17%
With friends/a friend	6%
With adult family members	4%
Other	6%

357 people gave information about their employment status, with full-time, part-time and self-employed people jointly making up 55.5% of the respondents and retired people forming a quarter of respondents.

Full-time employed	27.7%	Home maker	6.7%
Retired	25.2%	Unemployed	2.5%
Part-time employed	18.2%	Unable to work	1.7%
Self-employed	9.5%	Carer	0.6%
Student	7.6%	Financially independent	0.3%

Of 279 people who responded to the question *Do you consider yourself to have a disability?* 19 (7%) said that they did.

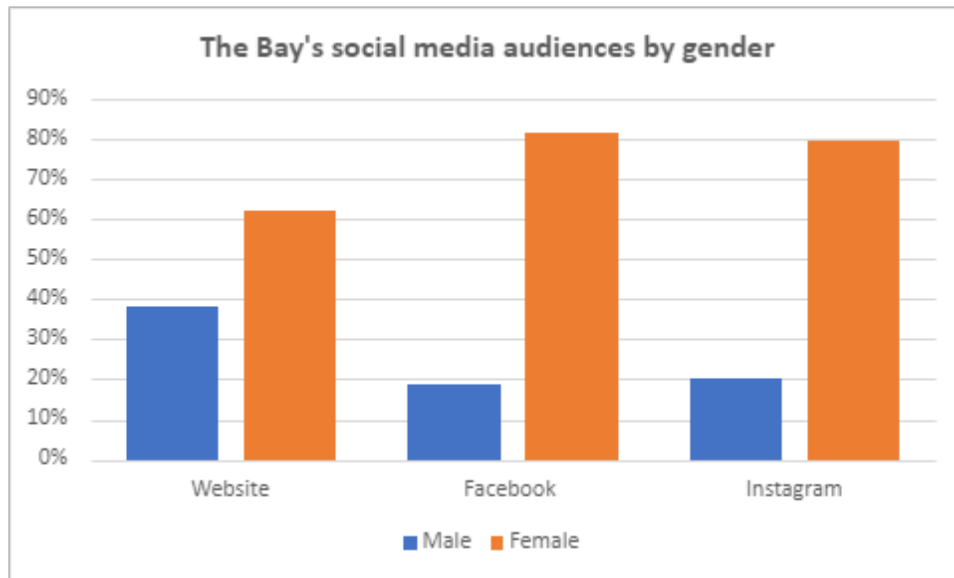
2.1.6 Records of actions for nature

All the project officers record any actions for nature associated with sessions and events that they have run. The data, covering the period from September 2021 to the end of April 2023, has some gaps, most significantly that the Community Engagement Officer for Morecambe mostly did not record the number of hours spent by participants and volunteers.

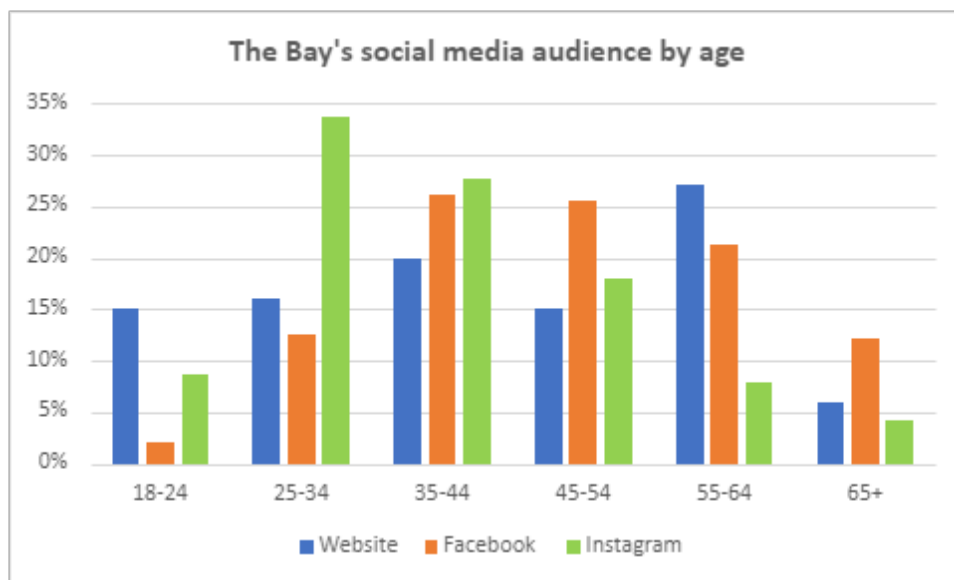
The data is also difficult in places because what constitutes an action for nature is open to interpretation: five people spending 10 hours removing an invasive species is recorded as a single action, as is the reporting of a sighting of a hedgehog to the big hedgehog map; meanwhile 15 people each receiving a bird feeding kit is noted as 15 actions, and five people creating 30 seed bombs is recorded as 30 actions. Clearly these larger numbers – at the extreme, 250 actions for making 250 bird feeding kits - skew the data massively. There is a logic to this, that activity on one site counts as one action, whereas activity that is then expected to reach multiple sites count is counted as the number of sites that it will reach. This gives a simple numeric count of activity but without any nuance about the relative value of the actions. While it is difficult to define what counts as ‘one’ action for nature, as the actions are very varied, the current records make their interpretation challenging, beyond noting that there have been a lot of actions. **Section 3.5.1** explores the data further.

2.1.7 Data from social media

We compiled and analysed data about The Bay’s social media reach. As the following chart illustrates, for each mode of communication the proportion of the users recorded as being female outnumbers that of males.



Looking at the records of users' ages, we can see that the website is most evenly used across the age groups. The age profile of people accessing The Bay's Instagram account is skewed towards younger people in comparison to those accessing The Bay's Facebook page.



2.2 Data generated by Lancaster University

For this research we wanted to hear from all stakeholders, so as to understand the programme and its success and challenges, and to learn from the people delivering it, those benefitting from it, and those involved in other ways. We focussed on qualitative research to get richer feedback about their experiences. The following table shows the activities we undertook and the participants for each element. Rows in italics are additional activities, which were added in response to requests from stakeholders during the research process, following the agreed research topic guides and consent

procedures. The process took place over a longer period than planned due to difficulties concerning ethics approval to undertake research with NHS staff.

Method	Participants	Date
<i>Specialist level</i>		
Online small group interview	3 Nature & Wellbeing Officers, one from each hub	20 April
In person focus group	4 people who completed the nature & wellbeing journey in Wyre and Morecambe	3 May
Online focus group	5 referral partners, all from Wyre	5 June
<i>Online feedback</i>	<i>Online feedback opportunity for referrers from community organisations, taken up by 1 person (working for NHS)</i>	<i>24 May to 2 June</i>
<i>Online feedback</i>	<i>Online feedback opportunity for NHS referrers, taken up by 3 people</i>	<i>30 May to 10 June</i>
<i>Targeted level</i>		
Online small group interview	2 Community Engagement Officers, from Barrow and Wyre hubs	12 April
In person focus group	6 volunteers who have helped run community events in Barrow and Morecambe	3 May
<i>Whole population level</i>		
Online small group interview	3 staff with responsibility for the whole population work (LWT's Nature and Wellbeing Manager and Communication Officer, and The Bay's Programme Manager)	6 April
<i>Business development</i>		
Online small group interview	4 staff with responsibility for the project's Business Development work (LWT's Nature and Wellbeing Manager, CWT's Development Manager, The Bay's Programme Manager, and The Eden Project's Head of Learning Partnerships)	2 May
<i>Other</i>		
In person interview	The Bay's Programme Manager	23 May
Online small group interview	2 NHS staff from Lancashire and South Cumbria Foundation Trust; the Deputy Chief Operating Officer and the Partnership Development Manager	6 June
Online focus group	4 people from the project's environmental partners	25 April

<i>Online feedback</i>	<i>Online feedback opportunity for environmental partners, not taken up by any organisations</i>	<i>18 to 31 May</i>
<i>Online focus group</i>	<i>2 people from among the project's community partners</i>	<i>27 April</i>
<i>Online feedback</i>	<i>Online feedback opportunity for community partners, taken up by 3 organisations</i>	<i>18 to 29 May</i>

All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed.

2.3 Research strengths and limitations

We outline here some of the strengths and weaknesses of this research:

- ✓ Lancaster University was able to hire an experienced local researcher to undertake the work, who fortunately was able to work over a longer time than planned.
- ✓ We were able to add some new activities as needs arose.
- ✓ We were able to generate and analyse a lot of new data in a short time.
- ✓ We were able to order and analyse most of the data that the project has been generating.

- ✗ None of the data is from a representative sample, so the analysis is indicative and not statistically robust.
- ✗ We had low response rates to many of the requests for feedback.
- ✗ The scope of the research was limited by the budget and the timeframe: as a result the design of the research did not include:
 - Getting feedback from The Bay's three current Trainees, nor from former members of staff;
 - Getting feedback from people referred to The Bay who did not go on to attend sessions;
 - Visiting all three hubs and being able to run focus groups in each location, where we might have had higher rates of participation;
 - Any participant observation, so we are reliant on second-hand feedback rather than having first-hand experience of project activities and processes;
 - Any assessment of value for money, cost-effectiveness or social return on investment.

3. Evaluation findings

3.1 Specialist level work through the nature & wellbeing sessions

Summary: The data from the nature and wellbeing participants' questionnaires (see **Section 3.1.4**) is encouraging: it suggests that the project is successfully engaging with people whose self-assessed wellbeing is in the bottom 15% of the population, and that taking part in the project is associated with significant improvements in wellbeing. It also suggests that participating in the nature and wellbeing sessions enables people to act on the five ways to wellbeing, and at high rates.

This positive feedback from people who have regularly attended sessions is supported by 13 case studies and by the four participants who came to our focus group. For these people The Bay has been a catalyst to get out of the house, to build their ability to interact with others, to grow confidence, and to find meaningful ways of connecting with nature which help their mental health resilience. They were full of praise for The Bay's staff and the care and support they have received. For their part, much of the

job satisfaction expressed by the Nature & Wellbeing Officers comes from their pleasure, and indeed pride, at seeing such participants flourish over time.

A rising rate of referrals in recent months suggests that the project will meet its two-year target of 432 *people most impacted by social exclusion and isolation* going to nature and wellbeing sessions, and therefore *engaged in regular positive activity, feeling happier and better connected*. We note that a pro rata target for Year 1 would not have been met, pointing to the need for long term commitment versus short project work for social prescribing programmes aiming to reach communities via referral pathways. Relationship-building with referral partners will always be an ongoing task.

Of 403 referrals to the end of April 2023, 29% of people did not, for various reasons, attend any sessions. This is in line with a national survey which found that 18% of people, and 40% of those who did not regularly spend time outdoors, did not attend the activity of their green social prescription (DHSC, 2023a). Of those who have finished attending The Bay's nature and wellbeing groups, 56% attended four or fewer sessions. This is partly due to the project offering shorter blocks of sessions to particular cohorts to increase its reach in underserved communities. However, it is not possible from the data to separate out all those short blocks from the more usual delivery mode of nature and wellbeing groups. We also note that exiting after a small number of sessions is not always a 'drop-out'; sometimes a few sessions is all that is needed to help someone, for example, during the transition from inpatient care to returning to employment. Furthermore, there are bound to be people who drop-out of any activity, all the more so when the activity is for people who are isolated, struggling to get outside and interact, and often facing multiple challenges. So we should not expect all referrals to lead to active and regular engagement with the project. More sophisticated monitoring of individual journeys would enable more robust reporting.

3.1.1 Awareness sessions for referral partners

The project had the target of running 50 awareness sessions for referral partners, including NHS clinicians, about the importance of nature connectedness for human wellbeing. The target is a little ambiguous, but if we interpret an 'awareness session' as interacting with at least one partner or clinician then we would expect the project to have 50 events and a total of at least 50 participants.

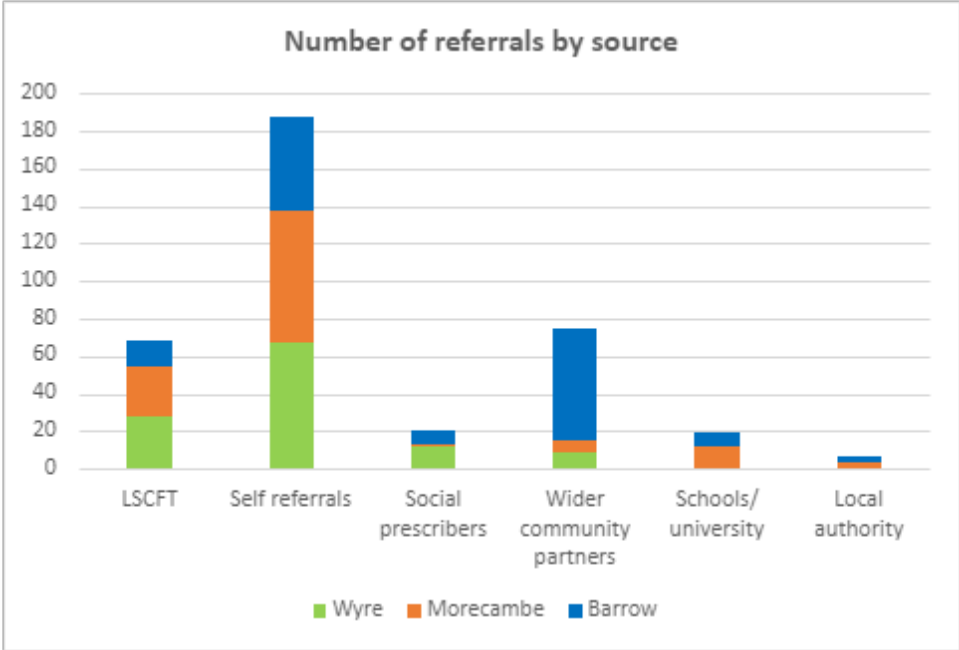
The following chart shows the number of sessions that staff have run. The first batch were run as dual-purpose activities both to engage local NHS staff with The Bay team and what it has to offer, while also providing a wellbeing break for frontline staff. However, the turnout was relatively poor compared to the numbers of people invited and the numbers who said they intended to come. Whilst supported strategically by senior staff, NHS staff were still working amidst the ongoing challenges of Covid19 and many struggled to take time away from challenging workloads, especially as a team. The project also found that the people who attended weren't always the people who refer or who have direct influence over green social prescriptions. In response, in the second batch of sessions, officers worked to engage local teams within their activities, either running an activity for a local team, or inviting them to participate in an existing nature and wellbeing group. NHS staff engaged locally included people from Early Intervention Services, MindsMatter (Talking Therapies), CAMHS, Occupational Therapists, Psychologists, Community Mental Health Nurses, Social Care Support Workers, Inpatient staff from The Cove, Community Mental Health Teams and PCN social prescribers.

	Barrow	Morecambe	Wyre	Total no of sessions	Total no of participants
Oct-Dec 22: bespoke sessions for NHS staff	7	2	5	14	94
Dec 22- Jul 23: Local sessions and engagement opportunities with local NHS partners	13	9	14	36	44
Totals	20	11	19	50	138

Although the smaller number of bespoke sessions engaged more NHS staff members, we note that these were separate events that needed planning and delivering, and the cohort of attendees was broader, so the targeting was less precise. The later strategy of local engagement within existing nature and wellbeing activities was more resource efficient for the team and ensured interaction with local NHS referring partners. Project managers note that both approaches were extremely useful in building relationships and referral pathways, and that this work is on-going; it needs to be embedded in long term plans because priorities for local NHS teams continue to evolve, and staff change roles.

3.1.2 Referral pathways

The following chart shows that ‘self-referrals’ (individuals who made direct contact with the project) are the dominant category, with 50% of the referrals. Note, the social prescribers mentioned here are not Link Workers working within the NHS.



Wider community partners account for 20% of the total, and LSCFT for 18%.

Within the LSCFT category the referrals come from a diverse range of sources:

	Wyre	Morecambe	Barrow	Total
Community Mental Health Team	11	16	6	33
Early Intervention Service (EIS)	8		3	11
OT Dova Ward, Barrow Hospital	1	2	3	6
Scarisbrick Unit	2	3		5
Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)		3		3
Rapid Intervention & Treatment Team	2			2
Wyre Integrated Network PCN	2			2
Mindsmatters	1			1
OT The Cove		1		1
Clinical Lead Nurse		1		1
Calico	1			1
ADHD Team		1		1
First Step			1	1
Total	28	27	13	68

As part of their onboarding, people who self-refer to The Bay are asked how they heard of the project. The following chart shows the categories in descending order, and shows the significance of social media and word of mouth.

How did you hear about us?	Number
Social media/media	52
Other or blank	37
Family/friend/word of mouth	33
Community Mental Health Team	20
The Bay event/The Bay hub/LWT	14
School or university	10
Local authority	5
Other NHS Provider	4
Social prescriber	4
Job Centre	2
Lancaster District Community Volunteer Service	2
Growing Well	2
Health care professional	1
Probation service	1
Total	187

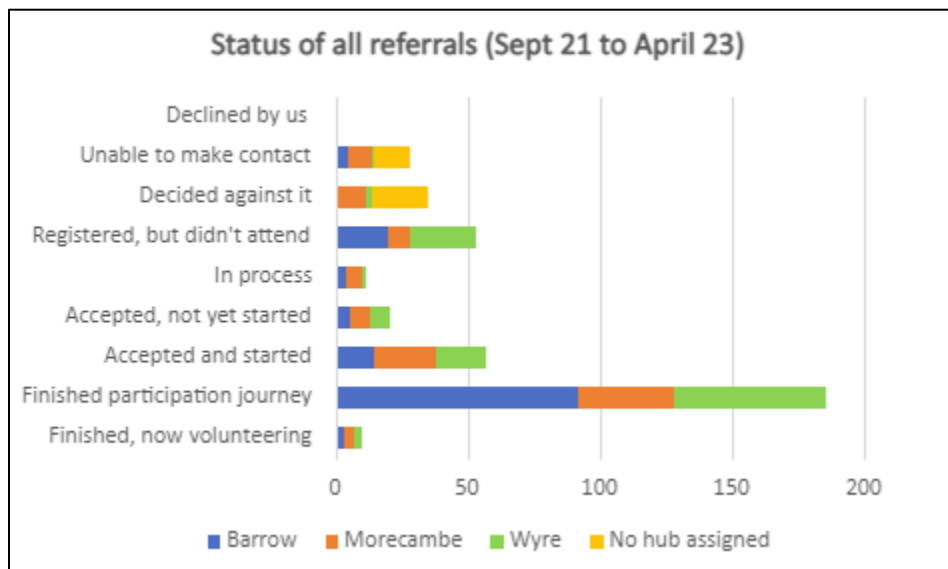
The rows in blue type highlight the instances where individuals approached The Bay themselves, but said that they heard about the project from NHS staff. This may be because the service is one that recommends activities but does not make referrals, or a prescriber has sought to reduce their workload by asking the person to self-refer, or because staff members have judged that it is better for the individual to make the call (for their own sense of agency, and/or as a test of their actual (rather than polite) interest in The Bay). If we add those 29 related-to-the-NHS referrals to the 68 direct-from-the-NHS referrals above, then the NHS's share of total referrals is 26%. It's possible that the actual

proportion was higher if people prefer not to mention that they have been in contact with mental health workers.

3.1.3 Referrals and retention

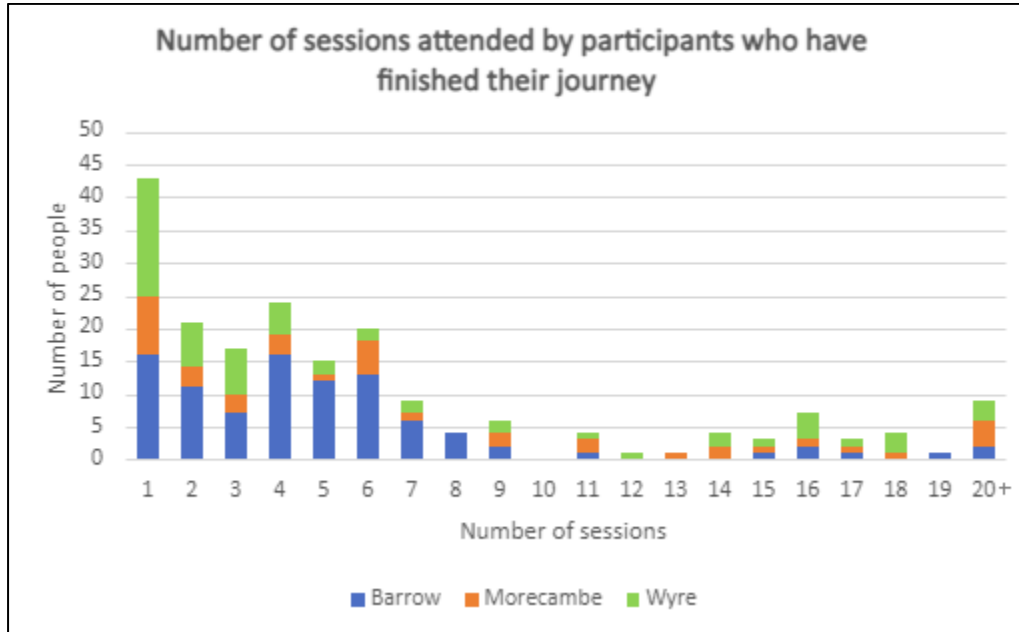
Referrals and retention are supported and managed locally by each Nature and Wellbeing Officer who follows each participant’s journey including when people have paused due to fluctuations in wellbeing but wish to remain in contact, potential progression opportunities, and people who are moving on to exit. It is difficult to manage and report centrally due to the person-centred approach of the delivery, and the need to avoid overloading the officers with administrative duties. The project does not report an overview of what happens to referrals or of retention, partly because the thankQ database does not currently provide that information. The project’s administrator had to go to each record individually to see the number of sessions each participant had attended, and create a new spreadsheet to share that information with us.

In total the sheet records 403 referrals. The following chart shows the number of people in each status category. It begins with four categories for people who were referred but did not go on to attend sessions, which in total account for 117 referrals (29%). (There was just one person declined by the project, which is too small to show on the bar chart). The category of ‘Accepted but not yet started’ is mostly people who have been referred recently, but also includes a few people who have delayed their start. As at the end of April 2023, 57 people (14%) had started but not finished their journey, and 196 (49%) had finished, with 10 of them now progressing on and active as Volunteers within the project.



Being ‘finished’ means that the person officially stopped coming to sessions. The following chart shows the distribution of how many sessions all the finishers (including those who have gone on to become volunteers) attended. It is noticeable that 43 (22%) are recorded as having attended only one session, with a further 62 (32%) finishing after going to two, three or four sessions. However, interpretation of this data is difficult because some people were not offered 12 sessions, but instead registered for a shorter block of 6 sessions, or attended a taster day (single extended session). While the project’s intention was to get individuals referred for up to around 12 sessions delivered through the nature and

wellbeing groups, in order to reach underserved groups the team has also worked directly with community and NHS partners, providing shorter blocks for their cohorts of clients. While some of these groups are obvious in the data and could be separated out, others are not, hence this chart shows all referrals.

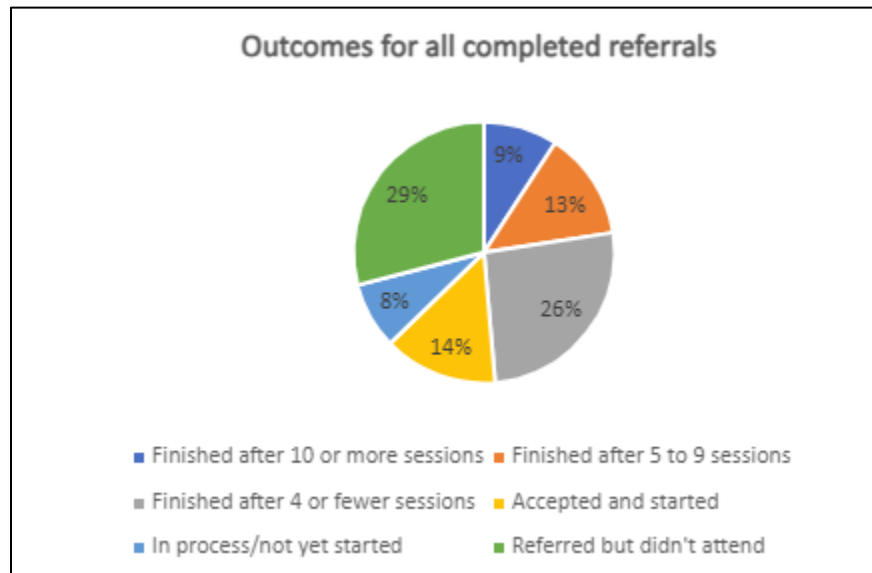


It is possible to view people exiting the project after a short number of sessions as negative (that they have ‘dropped-out’), but some early exits are because a few sessions were all that was needed. For example, one officer has had referrals from mental health wards seeking something for patients to do when discharged, and individuals have gained a lot from a few sessions before returning to work and finishing their journey with The Bay. Another had a participant who wanted to keep coming, but who found a new job which meant they could no longer attend. People may also finish their journey not because they want to but due to external circumstances, such as some asylum seekers who were attending sessions but were then relocated.

Of further note in the above chart is the people attending more than 12 sessions, including nine (5%) attending 20 or more sessions. These are all people who subsequently, and after exiting as participants, went on to become volunteers. Although the officers operate with an up-to-12 sessions guide, where groups sizes have allowed it and people have not been ready to move on they have been able to come for more than 12 sessions. People may also exceed 12 sessions if they attend some sessions, then pause, and then restart as if from their first session again, or when someone attends a short block and then joins a small group for a 12 session journey. We note that this flexible approach is one that supports wellbeing, as is The Bay’s willingness to keep in contact with someone when their wellbeing is low and they are not able to attend, with the aim of keeping the door open to them rejoining in the future.

The mean number of sessions attended is 6.3, with a range of 5.2 for Barrow to 8.5 in Morecambe. For current participants – those who had started but not finished as at the end of April 2023 – the mean is 3.2 sessions, with a range of 2.3 for Wyre to 3.6 for the other two hubs.

This pie chart shows the proportions of people from the 403 referrals in each of six categories:



Recent research for the UK government (DHSC 2023a) found that of those people that spoke to their GP about their mental health and were given a green prescription, 18% chose not to attend despite the referral. The rate of non-attendance was more than double (40%) among those who don't usually spend time outside (monthly or less). We do not have any data about how much time people referred to The Bay spend outside before referral, but this suggests its current rate of 29% not attending any sessions is within usual parameters.

Overall, a rising rate of referrals in recent months suggests that the project will meet its two-year target of 432 people most impacted by social exclusion and isolation going to nature and wellbeing sessions, and therefore engaged in regular positive activity, feeling happier and better connected. We note that a pro rata target for Year 1 would not have been met because of the time taken to establish the project and its referral pathways. This underlines the need for long term commitment versus short project work for social prescribing programmes.

3.1.4 Participants' questionnaires

a) Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well Being Scale

For the SWEMWBS analysis we excluded three cases where at least one question was unanswered. For people who had filled the questionnaire more than once we used the first data point. Ten entries (five pairs filled by the five people) lacked dates, so were excluded as we could not say which of the two entries was the earlier one. We were left with 109 individuals' responses. We produced a single SWEMWBS score for each of them, then transformed the raw scores to metric scores, as required for SWEMWBS analysis⁴. The mean score was 19.6, with a standard deviation of 4.0. This is the same as the expected score for the bottom 15% of the UK population (the whole population has a mean of 23.5

⁴https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/using/howto/swemwbs_raw_score_to_metric_score_conversion_table.pdf

and a standard deviation of 3.9)⁵ and suggests that the project is effectively reaching those categorised as having poor mental health. Note, however, that if many filled the questionnaire for the first time when they were already benefiting from participation in The Bay – ie not before their first session – then the mean score at outset might have been lower.

SWEMWBS was designed for assessing wellbeing in populations, rather than tracking that of individuals. However, it is also used as a ‘before’ and ‘after’ measurement for individuals’ wellbeing, and has been shown to be responsive to change at the individual level (Shah et al, 2018). Looking at the SWEMWBS scores for the 37 people who had filled in the questionnaire more than once, and with at least a three week gap between their data points, we find a mean difference in their transformed scores of 4.1. This is a positive indication, as evaluations of SWEMWBS’ responsiveness to changes in wellbeing suggest that a change of around 3 or more points can be considered a significant improvement⁶.

b) Other self-assessed measures of wellbeing

The questionnaire also asks the ‘ONS4’ questions, used by the Office for National Statistics to provide standardised information about personal wellbeing (ONS, 2018). Mean responses out of ten (with 0 denoting ‘not at all’ and 10 meaning ‘completely’) for ‘first time’ questionnaires from 109 individuals are shown below:

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?	5.4
Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?	5.6
How happy did you feel yesterday?	5.3
Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?	5.3

These are the mean scores for the 37 people for whom we have two data points at least 3 weeks apart:

	First	Second
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?	5.2	6.1
Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?	5.0	6.3
How happy did you feel yesterday?	5.0	6.1
Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?	5.5	4.2

Although the data set is small, it suggests a modest improvement on average for all four measures (note: for anxiety a reduction indicates improvement).

c) Level of activity

The questionnaire also asks respondents *“In the past week, on how many days have you done a total of 30mins or more of physical activity, which was enough to raise your breathing rate? This may include sport, exercise and brisk walking or cycling for recreation or to get to and from places, but should not include housework or physical activity that is part of your job.”*

⁵ <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/using/howto/>

⁶ <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/using/faq/>

The mean score (out of 7 days) was 3.5 for the 109 questionnaires, and 3.1 rising to 3.5 for the group with two data points.

d) Self-assessed effects of participation in The Bay’s nature & wellbeing sessions

Respondents who are filling the questionnaire for a second or third time are asked some additional questions. The following data is for 42 responses from 40 people. For *Has participating in The Bay Nature and Wellbeing changed how you feel about the environment and nature?* 88.1% ticked the option ‘yes, positively’, with the remainder indicating ‘no change (no one ticked the option ‘yes, negatively’).

The following five questions had only ‘yes’ and ‘no’ as answers, with each question:

As a result of taking part with sessions have you...	% Yes
Been more active?	95.2%
Given something back (to others/the community/ nature)?	85.7%
Noticed something I’ve never looked at closely before?	95.2%
Learnt something new?	97.6%
Met new people?	88.1%

A sample of 42 is very small, but the participants’ responses indicate that the nature and wellbeing sessions have enabled them to act on the five ways to wellbeing, at high rates:



e) Responses to open questions

38 people responded to the invitation *Tell us about something you have achieved on a session*, and their answers fall into these themes:

- Learning: eg *“Learnt about marine food chains and why threats to the oceans are really important”* and *“Learnt how to and successfully made a bird table complete with hooks for hanging fatballs. Also learnt and successfully did some coppicing.”*
- Socialising: eg *“Been more social”, “Getting to know people”* and *“Try to get involved”*.

- Doing: eg “*Making a fire from scratch (no matches) and making elderberry cordial*”, “*Planted different things*” and “*I did DIY, building and decorating planters*”.

There were also 38 responses to the question *What have you found most useful at The Bay?*, with the themes being as follows:

- Getting outdoors, meeting people, and “*doing something different*” in a safe space.
- Learning, including learning new skills, how to use equipment, gardening tips, and gaining better understanding of nature.
- Spending time in nature, feeling closer to nature, and getting better at noticing nature: learning “*To appreciate what's on my doorstep.*”
- “*Doing practical things*” and enjoying using a microscope, “*doing science for fun*” and using a drill and spray paints.
- Personal growth, such as “*understanding myself more.*”

These responses clearly link back to the five ways of wellbeing and to addressing isolation.

The questionnaire asks *Do you have any suggestions for improvements to The Bay? If so, please explain.* Excluding responses such as “*Can't think of anything that could be done any better*” 10 people gave their suggestions:

- Have more sessions, and longer sessions, run sessions “*every week forever*”, expand the project.
- Have alternative therapy groups.
- Do more of the relaxation techniques, such as five things you can see.
- Do more crafts, and make more star or animal themed items to take home to pets.
- Have a drop-in centre for the public to access information⁷.

3.1.5 Case studies

The Bay’s project staff had gathered 13 simple case studies from participants of nature and wellbeing sessions: six each from Wyre and Barrow and one from Morecambe. Some are first person accounts, others were recorded by the officer. We share three excerpts here, which reflect the tone and tenor of the complete set:

X referred herself, she had heard about the group via a friend and thought it would benefit her as she had not long moved to the area and wanted to meet people, but was struggling with social anxiety, so the group small numbers acted as a safe place for her to go and meet others. On the first week she brought her friend with her, on the second week her friend couldn't make it and she nearly dropped out, but she messaged the session leader and found the courage to come along as she didn't want to miss out. Throughout the sessions she was fascinated about what she was being taught and tried to take everything on board, starting from not picking much up to taking the beach home with her! After one month she started to engage with the community events. There was a UV rockpooling session that she had really wanted to try as it sounded interesting, she had discussed it in session a few weeks before and had been reassured. On the day of the event she was messaging the officers, after thinking she wasn't going to show up she arrived with her partner and ended up staying out till the end, showing off all the knowledge she had learned about species! The confidence that shone through was beautiful to see. From having minimal confidence and social

⁷ A drop-in centre has now been opened in Morecambe town centre)

anxiety, X went on to be one of the lead people in the groups and would take other new starters beach combing to see what they could find.

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*Y had an earlier history of offending, minor mental health challenges and progressive physical challenges. He experiences frustrations in his personal life, and has tried seeing psychics, going to church, various mind techniques and exercise to try and improve. He heard about the nature & wellbeing sessions through his support housing officer. Over three months of coming to The Bay there has been a dramatic change. He first presented as boisterous, needing to be the loudest voice in the room, but while attending his confidence has gradually enabled him to allow others to open up whilst he sits back, listens and supports them. He has found it rewarding being out in nature and giving back to the community, and is eager to get hands on in the different conservation projects. He has also started to come to different community events bringing his young children. His pride at receiving his John Muir Award shows how the project provides positive feedback and encouragement, with him constantly wanting to work towards the next level.*

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I came back to my hometown after a lifetime away and felt disconnected, lost within my state of mind, and I didn't know where to turn. At my lowest, I got convicted for drink driving, but the support worker from the police gave me details for The Bay and everything just fell into place. It's helped by having someone to talk to every week, having the opportunity to learn new skills, be outside, feel part of helping the community as well as myself. I felt that I could speak openly and honestly without any judgement. I was able to be outside at the beach, which I loved, with company I admired. I've found my reconnection with my art and feel more confident in myself to stand alone. I couldn't have done it without this group, I cannot thank them enough for sticking with me and allowing me to develop as the person I didn't think was there anymore. They've shown me the beauty of my home.

3.1.6 Focus group with The Bay's Nature & Wellbeing Officers

This focus group was with the three Nature & Wellbeing Officers, one from each hub. Wyre's officer had many years' experience of similar work in LWT's Myplace project.

a) What's worked well

The three officers had a very positive attitude towards the work and the satisfaction that they get from seeing participants' wellbeing and confidence improve, as this exchange shows:

1: "For me the positives are working with individuals for the sort of three, or sometimes slightly longer than three, month period and seeing their growth as individuals and these people really becoming more confident. I think particularly with people who started coming along to my sessions and have now progressed onto volunteering and, you know they were initially sort of really needing that support and that nurturing environment and now they've got to the point where they're giving so much back...

2: ...It's just really nice once you see people who when they first came on a session completely, like, with social anxiety to the point its basically debilitating, or they need a support worker to come along with them, to then, after the three months or longer, going into that volunteering role and actually wanting to welcome people to the group.... seeing them flourish, its beautiful.

3: I think they have pretty much nailed it. Just that confidence you see. I think friendships, inevitably people form friendships. That peer support, yeah, it's special to see how people kind of develop in a

relatively short space of time, from very small steps to going back to college...I just think they would never have done that. And people meet up socially and go for walks together out of sessions."

One also mentioned the pleasure in winning over someone who is initially doubtful, but who shifts to recognising the value of the sessions:

"I've had a few people who are like there willingly, but I think they've been a bit sceptical, like 'oh I won't get anything out of this, this isn't really for me'. And then, I think that's the most rewarding, when people are like 'you've changed my mind!'.

Within the framework of the five ways to wellbeing, and the approach of being person-centred, the officers appreciated having a lot of flexibility in the content of their sessions. This enables them to adapt sessions to the participants and changing circumstances, and to play to their own strengths, for example, one using her yoga experience to provide mindful movement elements, another using his lepidopterist skills to do mindfulness through butterfly identification.

They agreed that it is best to offer a variety of activities within each session, so that people try different things each week, including things which they may think they don't like, such as crafting. They also offer options within the activities, so that individuals can engage in the way that most suits them:

"So this week for example we're going to the honeycomb worm reef area that we have. All of the group does a little bit of a small nature walk to get down there, a bit of mindfulness with the pebbles. And then I give people options: if you want to do some surveying we can get the quadrats out and do some surveying; if you want to do some GP coordinates you can do that; if you don't fancy doing that you can do some sketching. So we have various things all going on at the same time so people can dip in and dip out as to whatever they feel comfortable, whichever kind of floats their boat."

They also agreed that, where practical, it's valuable to have a mix of people in the nature and wellbeing groups, such as people of different ages and people facing different challenges. As one explained, *"I think when there's different strengths and weaknesses in a group it also makes people feel more confident because where they are stronger, where somebody else is weaker, they can actually help. And so it kind of gives that relationship where they all have something to give each other, linking to the five ways of wellbeing."* This can become challenging when individuals have limitations that prevent them taking part in the usual range of activities, for example, because they don't have enough mobility to reach the location, or, in the case of people with dementia, the cognitive ability to engage fully. However, it is possible to offer options, to run sessions in more accessible locations for a sub-set of participants, and to make the condition that a carer accompanies individuals who need one-to-one support.

One officer also noted that although they have a quite thorough on-boarding process, they can usually get someone from referral to attending their first session within one or two weeks, which is quite fast compared to access to other therapies. This is because new participants can join an existing group, they don't need to wait weeks for a new group to begin, and mostly they do not have waiting lists for their groups.

b) Main challenges

The main issue the officers identified was supporting participants towards the end of their journey, and the point when they stop coming to sessions; as one stated *"It doesn't get any easier, it's always the*

worst bit of it". Project officers explain the timeframe to participants from the outset, and remind people when they carry out reviews during their journey. Towards the end they support individuals to consider and make plans for their next steps, such as thinking about what other groups they might attend. Officers try to connect participants to The Bay's community engagement work and other local opportunities, to help people transition to different activities. But participants may feel abandoned, and can become stressed and negative about the countdown, with some attending less frequently to postpone the end. One related how some of her participants had talked about it:

"Community engagements are sparse with loads of different people who they don't know, so even though they've formed that confidence, when it comes to going into big community engagement events, it's that that's putting them off...it's different people and it's not on a consistent basis. Because they're unemployed they haven't got much structure in their lives, so to take that structure away and have something every now and then would really affect them".

However, the officers recognised that the 'budget' of around 12 sessions is needed, because otherwise – as one had observed in another project - some people could come for years potentially causing waiting lists to build. The cut off also aims to prevent or reduce dependency on the project and project officer.

Another challenge is that the groups have to begin by operating at less than full capacity, which undermines the peer support effect within a group, and may contribute to slow growth in delivery over the first 18 months: *"having that critical mass that there's enough camaraderie that people feel like they want to come back and keep building those relationships"*. (This is also a problem in terms of cost-effectiveness, with the same staffing for two or eight participants.) However, numbers can fluctuate, both because individuals (for many reasons) may not attend regularly, and because referrals do not come at steady pace (as illustrated in **Section 2.1**): *"On one session we had, like, one or two people on it for probably six months, and then in the past week we've had about 10 referrals onto it, so now there's a waiting list!"* Certainly, the officers have all invested time in reaching out to referrers to build the flow of people into the project, and to some extent whether or not referrers then refer to them depends on the individual:

1: "I think we've all been pretty good at inviting these people [referrers] out to our sessions to see them first hand and I think that, when they've experienced it themselves they're more likely to be enthusiastic about it. But unfortunately it does come down to individuals, as in referrers thinking what we do is good and selling it for us.

2: I've got like a few referrers who are really, they know what we're about, they've been to some of our sessions, they've worked with people that have benefitted and they're really keen to refer ... And there's other people ...just no engagement at all.

3: I know somebody who said when he originally had the meeting with the social prescriber The Bay was the first thing she'd mentioned. And she'd been to one of the open days we did for the NHS, and she's one of the people who do keep referring. Where I know other people who went on that NHS training day, I haven't heard a thing from. So it is very person based, and I guess what they feel maybe helps them as to what they then advise to other people."

One officer noted that making connections by working with community groups is more effective than just advertising The Bay's services:

"I've found that most of my referrals haven't actually come from the NHS, they've actually come from different organisations that I've worked with... for example, I was working with the youth

groups of an organisation and now they're starting to refer quite a few adults ...once you get the reputation with a certain person or group then it's that word of mouth that works better than obviously just spamming flyers. Which is obviously needed for the initial, but word of mouth internally through organisations is definitely stronger."

Having got a referral the next challenge is that of getting a newly referred person to attend their first session:

"I think one of the biggest hurdles I find is getting people to come for that first time...we can't obviously meet people at their house and bring them along and all that, we haven't got the capacity to do that. But you know certain people, certain social prescribers, certain individuals from organisations are really supportive and do a lot of hand holding to get people there, and it makes such a massive difference. And once they've made that first step, if they get it they keep coming. I mean if people don't like it that's fine, at least they've tried it. But I think that first step is so important, so difficult."

The Barrow officer talked about the challenge of being pulled in different directions. The advice from the Wyre officer was "It's taken me many a year, but I've learnt to say 'no'." He went on to explain "I think what's really important is to give people consistency.... having something regular, they know where it is... sometimes it's better to offer less, but yeah still give the variety of locations and activities and all the rest of that. Unfortunately we haven't got enough hours in the day to get everywhere doing everything."

c) Ideas for improvement

As already mentioned, one challenge to participants transitioning from the small and regular nature and wellbeing groups to The Bay's community engagement events is that the latter are usually one-off events involving larger groups of people. As such they don't fit as well for people with preference for a regular event to look forward to with known others. One Nature & Wellbeing Officer is considering having a regular litter pick and social gathering for 'graduates' of the nature and wellbeing sessions. Another had set up a 6-week block of conservation activities, and a laughter yoga group, as stepping stones between the nature and wellbeing sessions and the community engagement sessions. An alternative would be that the community engagement officers take on that role, running a regular public event but with an eye to serving people who have finished the nature and wellbeing journey.

One officer noted their need to be more systematic about administration, ensuring that all steps are taken for each event, and for recording data after each event. Another officer shared their checklist, which they have laminated and uses and reuses.

Another officer noted there is more they could do in terms of contacting participants outside of the sessions to nurture their engagement, such as sharing the infographic that they receive when submitting survey data, or setting little challenges to do during the week.

They also spoke of having a better sense of what budget they have for their work, explaining that knowing in advance would help them to plan, and to be able to explain to partners what funding they can or can't bring to a joint activity. While the officers do not seek permission before buying inexpensive items that are needed to run a session, for more costly purchases such as tools or the inputs for a rooftop garden they currently have to put a request to the Programme Manager, and may feel awkward doing so, particularly as they do not know the size of the overall budget and therefore what

might be reasonable to ask for. The officer in Wyre, who had secured a pot of £5,500 funding, said he found it useful to know what he had and to be able to plan and spend it with autonomy.

3.1.7 Focus group with participants of nature and wellbeing sessions

This focus group was attended by four people; all had completed their nature & wellbeing journey, and one had previously taken part in the Myplace project. The three from Wyre are now volunteers with The Bay, while the person from Morecambe is considering volunteering. As such they by no means represent 'typical' participants. Instead, their feedback gives us insights into the views of some people who have a good deal of experience of, and enthusiasm for, the project.

Unfortunately the participants from Barrow who had registered to attend the focus group were unable to travel to Lancaster on the day.

a) What's worked well

The participants had a lot of positive feedback about the project, and a good deal of concurrence between their experiences of sessions in Wyre and in Morecambe. Overall they applauded The Bay's focus on each individual's wellbeing and happiness, rather than, as they suspected, the focus on employment and social integration that other services have.

They spoke a lot about the staff and their approach and skills. For example, they agreed and appreciated that The Bay's staff are very attentive to the needs of each person in a group over time, as one explained:

"I felt like the staff were very sensitive to my mental health... quite obviously giving us support at the start and keeping an eye on us and making sure we felt supported and we knew what we were doing. And then gradually as they got to know us they split us off into groups and doing more independent things."

While talking in general about the staff sensitivity to participants' needs – such as being very warm, non-judgemental, giving people space, not forcing any participation – one also mentioned a specific action he had appreciated:

1: "We went to the library the last couple of weeks [of his journey] and I didn't know where the library was at all. So I just called Mike up, he walked round to meet me there, and we walked there together.

2: Yeah, same for me.

1: Next time I went I knew exactly where to go."

They also praised the way in which the staff go about their work with a positive attitude, and encourage participants to improve their mood:

1: "Even if you've not got a positive attitude it makes you feel that way. You can't not feel that way with Mike and Chloe, it's great.

2: There's never been a negative environment at all, never been a bad atmosphere, it's always been great-

3: I've always gone away feeling better.

1: Same here.

4: *I think the staff are quite resilient...like sometimes someone's having a real downer and they'll be like, 'oh, you're doing a great job!'*

3: *They must get a lot of like negative energy, people talking about their problems all the time. But Mike and Chloe they're always like-*

1: *You can tell they're passionate about their jobs."*

While admiring some staff members' ecological knowledge they liked how staff were humble and encouraging, happy to look up finds together when they weren't able to identify something:

"Yes, that sort of looking things up with you! They weren't genuinely, like, knowing everything, they were knowledgeable, but then they both kind of explained how they were on their own early journeys. And one of the things I took from the sessions that is what I'm continuing now is my nature diary which I got the idea from Megan. She showed us how she's learning through doing that process. So it's not like she already knows everything, she's showed us how it's kind of constant learning."

In terms of administration they were happy about the communication with The Bay, with enough notice for sessions.

Regarding the content of the sessions, they appreciated the wide range of activities, the way that everything is laid on (materials provided), the options within each session, and the lack of pressure placed on them.

1: *"It's a bit like primary school... really enjoyable kind of, yeah just kind of free flow activity-*

2: *Relaxed, no pretence.*

3: *There's no assessment.*

4: *Low pressure isn't it?*

2: *Yeah. Even if we were like building a bird box it's like-*

4: *Yeah, doesn't have to be perfect!*

2: *-even though I'm rubbish at DIY and stuff it's still fun doing it.*

...

2: *It's the sort of thing I wouldn't necessarily think to do on my own but when you're doing it in a group it's like 'I'm actually enjoying doing this!'*

4: *Yeah, I enjoyed the DIY.*

1: *They've done a lot of the effort for you, like provide the tools.*

...

1: *One of the great things about the sessions was that it was, every week was a new topic ...we did like identifying bees, plants, seaside related things. So just something to spark your interest, it's not like they're doing bird watching every week or we're looking at trees every week. It's something different. So if somebody's having a down time then one week, they might get enthusiastic about something and that can make a really big difference.*

3: *Yeah, there's always different things or you can we might go inside for a coffee if someone doesn't like-*

1: *-it's like primary school, you try different things and it's always fresh, always interesting and you've got that leadership. Whereas other groups, like a bird watching group, I feel like that's something maybe they don't have, like they're maybe a bit specialised... It might be more you turn up and do your own thing".*

They also appreciated how many of the activities encouraged them to be more present and mindful, sometimes explicitly:

1: *I quite liked it when they took the lead, like I say a bit like primary school. So there was one time we were doing a walk and Megan just said 'right well let's stop everybody and let's just look at this bit of moss or this tree, or something like that, and we were all a bit like looking at each other, like, 'what is this about? We're just looking at this tiny bit of moss!'. And she really went with it, she was, like, 'I want you to focus on it, I want you to look how beautiful it is and think about it'. And at first we all thought it was a bit silly, you know, felt weird, but it was really quite nice. Because if she hadn't really led that we would never have taken that moment to stop.*

2: *Mike did that with me as well with lichens on a tree. He pointed that out. I didn't know what they were. So I learnt something as well as-*

3: *That's kind of mindfulness I think.*

2: *Yeah*

3: *Taking a minute to listen to all sounds in nature, the waves crashing.*

They enjoyed all the activities but linked those that include actions for nature to gaining satisfaction:

1: *It used to be litter picking for me, I don't know whether it's like just the satisfaction of removing it or, I don't know...there's just something about it's gratifying. But I kind of like doing bird boxes and things, just, like, the manual, and then the gratification when its finished.*

2: *I quite like the walking parts of it, just, yeah, 'that's nature'. But we've been doing the DIY, the bird boxes, that was quite fun. We planted a bunch of wildflower seeds at the library as well-*

3: *Yeah that was really fun, doing it with [2] as well. So you're having a good chat and you're doing something. You do feel a sense of achievement afterwards.*

2: *You know you're working towards a good end.*

1: *And you're always getting reassured by either your friends or Mike or whatever.*

They also applauded the way in which the project gets people outdoors, and in all weathers, preferring to interact outdoors than indoors:

1: *I think outdoors is more relaxed...say if we're all sat in a circle like this, for some people it might be quite intimidating. But if you're just walking alongside someone-*

2: *I feel the same. The attention isn't on you, it's on things, so definitely I'd rather be outside than inside.*

1: *People are free to just wonder off and like just do their own thing and-*

2: *Yeah, if you need a minute you can just kind of-*

1: *Yeah, you don't feel threatened-*

3: I felt that as well, that you don't have that feeling of being trapped. I think when you've got mental health issues then when you're indoors sometimes you do feel a bit trapped.

2: Absolutely.

They also took pleasure in how participants support their peers within the group, not resenting others' low moods but instead enjoying the times when they can help lift someone: *"It's really nice when you feel like you've helped somebody feel more cheerful, if they've finished the session feeling better..."*

Each spoke positively about their own journeys with The Bay and the effects on their wellbeing. For one the key factor was having a regular event to attend, which then led to other changes:

1: I was pretty much stuck in my room for the majority of the day and just not doing a whole lot. I was better than I was but I still wasn't going out or doing things. It [The Bay] made me, even one day a week, it just made me get out and that led to me, I'm now out every single day. I do so much, like, I go outside to do a workout every day, and I'm really improving every aspect of my life because it started at The Bay. Just one day a week and it grew and grew.

Uni: And how did you used to feel about that one day a week as it drew nearer?

1: It was initially a little bit daunting, but after a couple of weeks it was, like, something to look forward to. I can go and see everyone and-

Uni: And so how did you then move from not going out, to one day a week with The Bay, and then you've added in other things, how has that worked?

1: Well Mike said something to me, because I get a really long bus journey, if you see an old person on the bus just talk to them because that might be the only person they talk to for the whole day because there's loads of loneliness in old people. So I just spoke to the odd elderly person or random stranger in the street, and I grew my confidence then to go to other places, and I started going to a snooker club, and going to a chess club, doing loads of things. So I'm now talking to a wider range of people because of The Bay.

2: It's like a snowball effect really-

1: Absolutely

2: -increases your confidence in so many other areas. I used to dread making conversation with people because I used to find it really difficult and draining, thinking of things to say. Now I actually enjoy it, it enjoy talking to people. Most of the time.

Another participant reflected on how the sessions have enabled her to build her resilience:

I did have like a really bad spell just before I started the [Bay] sessions and I think that one of the most helpful things for me, aside from it just being a welcome environment and everything, and enjoying the sessions, was that it kind of helped me to then find ways of looking after myself when I was away from the sessions. So I've got my nature diary which I still do now. I actually joined the local Bird Watching Club as well. So that's another kind of organisation or another structured way of making sure that I'm doing things that are good for me, because it's easy to sit at home and just not do anything ...I didn't have to necessarily rely on just those sessions, but those sessions were kind of like a kick start to then me taking that initiative to do similar type things.

The other participants also spoke about how they use ideas from the sessions to cope outside of the sessions.

1: At The Bay it also teaches you different coping mechanisms like, for example, looking for geometric shapes in nature. So if I'm having an off day I'll just go and look at some leaves and find the shapes.

2: Something to focus on isn't it.... Mike says 'it's always here for you, nature's always here for you! You don't have to just do it at these sessions', which is bang on, it's absolutely true.

b) Main challenges

One challenge they acknowledged was people dropping out of sessions, usually due to a dip in their mental health. Related to this is the challenge for staff of supporting someone who is not well enough to participate during a session. (The Bay does not provide a clinical mental health service and staff are supported to be open and clear about the projects boundaries in this regard.)

1: Some people were really really struggling and, you know, at breaking point, pretty much that they couldn't come to sessions. I just felt like the staff were doing such a good job and actually they couldn't meet all those person's needs, and they were trying really hard but actually they've got a session to run as well. And actually that person really needed like a counsellor or a doctor. And obviously, like, because of the NHS being, you know, having so many problems.

Uni: So that's in a session when somebody kind of needs one-on-one help?

1: Basically one on one counselling yeah. And sometimes the staff would talk to them, they were trying to do two things at once, they were really trying to support that person, their mental health, but at the same time trying to run the session for the rest of the people. I think they did a good job to be honest.

One person mentioned the 12-session cut off as a challenge, preferring it if people could attend for more sessions. They also recognised that the project needs to find more funding to continue. One outlined his plans to do some fundraising for The Bay by getting sponsored to run a marathon.

c) Ideas for improvement

The participants talked about the possibility of offering additional support to people who need it, recognising that The Bay's staff are not trained counsellors and do not have the time to give intensive one-on-one support. Though they also questioned if it is reasonable for The Bay to take on that role, and that they could instead be good at pointing people in the right direction to get extra support. An alternative approach they considered would be a transitional group staffed by a trained counsellor for people with greater mental health challenges, with a view to participants improving and moving onto the group of people whose mental health is more stable⁸.

They felt that the promotion around the project is not great, with a low following on Instagram, and that it needs improving. They suggested paying for advertising, hiring a social media expert, and promoting

⁸ LWT's wider work in Greater Manchester is currently trialling a similar approach with Pennine Care, creating a group for people exiting Early Intervention Services and Community Mental Health Teams. They attend as a cohort with a clinical psychologist for 8 weeks prior to having the opportunity for referral into either their local Myplace group, or another local green group. The wider LWT programme has also supported placements for trainee Occupational Therapists considering how these roles might usefully embed into non-clinical programmes. Often considerations around nature based social prescribing focus on local nature activities as an alternative, more cost-effective option instead of the NHS, but collaboration between nature groups and the NHS is another option.

through the screens and walls of GP surgeries. While three of them had been referred to the project through NHS routes, one was not:

“It didn’t get mentioned to me, even though I did talk to NHS staff about my wellbeing. They were much quicker to offer medication... I think I found out about it on the internet somewhere.”

3.1.8 Focus group with referral partners

Five people attended the focus group for referrers: two working as social prescribers for a group of GP practices, two occupational therapists within the community mental health team, and one psychological wellbeing practitioner. Although we invited 63 people from around the bay, working for the NHS and community groups, all the people who attended were connected to the Wyre hub and working for the NHS.

a) What’s worked well

The participants were happy with how The Bay’s nature and wellbeing sessions fit with a significant part of their own mandate, to connect people to groups and activities that can help their wellbeing. As one said

“Biggest thing we’ve found is predominantly it’s been very good for people’s mental health, for getting them out and about mixing with people, not on a huge basis, which can quite often put them off. Getting outdoors. And it seems to be lifting people’s low mood quite considerably.”

Another related:

“I’ve had a gentleman go and he’s found it really useful. He lost his wife last year and has been really struggling kind of getting back out, he likes being outdoors and things but that was something they always did together, so it was difficult for him to do it on his own. But he’s found The Bay has really kind of helped him get back out doing the things he enjoys. So he’s been going for a couple of weeks now and he’s said he really enjoys it. So he’s been trying to go every week.”

The prescribers in Cleveleys noted that there are fewer groups and opportunities near to them compared to Blackpool and Fleetwood, so appreciated having The Bay:

I think for us The Bay is great because it is one of those things we can say ‘it’s at your local seafront, it’s not far to go. Whereas when we say about something in Fleetwood or Blackpool they’re like ‘that’s a 20 minute drive away, I’m not going up there’ or ‘I’ve got to get two buses’....so that’s a big thing for us, being able to say to people ‘actually it is on your doorstep, you’re not having to go into Blackpool or into Fleetwood, it’s somewhere where you know where it’s easily accessible’.

In contrast a participant based in Blackpool said:

I think that this is one of many for us and yeah, a lot of people wouldn’t travel to some of the places of The Bay. There are lots of gardening groups and walking groups and indoor groups, craft groups and things as well. So it’s just about trying to tailor what’s best for the person and then taking into account their physical abilities and transport options, and by the time you sort of cut those down you’re talking about quite a small percentage that would be appropriate for any particular group.

b) Main challenges

The participants identified two ways in which the accessibility of the sessions is a challenge. One issue is the location of the sessions in terms of distance from people’s homes:

"I think for me the main barrier is where they're held. Too far away for people to get to. But I have quite a few on my caseload that would like to go and would attend if there was something nearer."

They explained that although they can help many people to get a disabled bus pass, making bus or tram travel cost-free, people's anxiety and unwillingness to spend a long time travelling can make the sessions inaccessible.

The second issue is that many of the people they are working with have long-term issues with their physical health which make the sessions inaccessible, even if the location is close to the person's home.

The social prescribers at the focus group work with each patient for 12 weeks (though this can be extended, or repeated at a later date) and spoke about trying to avoid creating dependency and the limits of what they can do.

"...we have to stress we're not a long-term intervention. So if they kind of won't meet us halfway they're going to be, you know they might end up being where they were three months prior. So sometimes we find that they do want us to hand hold them and we have to try and stress it's about empowering them to help themselves, not us do everything for them. And sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. We have to accept we can't help everybody unfortunately, much as we'd like to."

The same participant noted that patients may face a complex group of problems which make it difficult for them to benefit from the social prescribing process, and requires perseverance:

We tend to find out very quickly whether anyone's going to engage in anything. We're not usually wrong. Because you spend quite a bit of time on the initial home visit, or people that might want to come into the surgery instead because maybe the problem's at home, then we book a room. And you kind of get a feel for people. And we love to be surprised!... But there's, we have a lot of very complex people... we do see some really good results, and like I say we are more than happy to be surprised, and we just keep trying and trying till we realise maybe now is not the right time and we encourage them to come back when they feel like they can engage better, and quite a few do and they are in a better place, which is brilliant because then we can kind of start again."

Another participant commented:

The hardest thing we find is to flip around the negativity that the people feel. So we try and say 'well, let's not concentrate on all the things you can't do, let's work on what you can do' and try our best to flip that round and start with small steps. So that's the hardest thing, breaking down the negativity and saying 'there's a lot you still can do. Yes your mobility's poor but we'll give you solutions that you might like to try to get you out to places'.

Another disadvantage for some people is that The Bay's nature and wellbeing offer is for 12 sessions:

I do think that most of the people we're working with, we're wanting things that they can continue doing long term...a lot of those sort of outdoor activities they're looking for routine and structure and building relationships and, yeah, that longer term option. So something that they know is going to come to an end might put people off signing up to it in the first place, and choose to do something different like a gardening or an allotment group that they can just keep going to for the next four years if they want to.... It can take some people quite a while to get into something if they've not done anything for a long time. And then yeah the anxiety of knowing that that is going

to stop.... So it's thinking through why is it beneficial for them to go to The Bay specifically if it's going to come to an end for them....

The referrers also spoke about how difficult it is to keep track of all the local options that they might recommend to individuals:

Uni: How do you keep in mind the 100 groups, or however many it is, that you could potentially refer to?

1: Lots of files on the computer, that I usually forget where I've put something, so I have to be reminded!

2: We're always rethinking how to store so that everyone can access them, because people have their own go to's and you forget what else is out there.

3: Yeah, I have an email folder full of all sorts of things!

4: There used to be Our Lancashire, that used to be really handy, it was a webpage that would show you what went on if you put your postcode in. But that seems to have ceased to run, which is quite frustrating ...now we just have to ring up, if we get something, or like she said, we've got files upon files then we just have to ring round every so often and just check that what we've got listed is still running. So it's very time consuming.

3: There's the FYI directory, but it's for Blackpool. It is still online but similarly you've got to check everything because even things that you think you'd referred somebody to, or taken somebody to six months ago, it might have gone by now.

2: There's something called NHS service finder and that has things on. But it's not comprehensive. Also in LSCFT, in different areas they have like signposting meetings every month. So I've jumped into one of those for like Preston or something, and they've got someone running through everything, what groups are on, what updates. And the idea is we're going to get that in this area, but that doesn't seem to be forthcoming at the moment. But seems useful because they have providers giving an overview of stuff as well. But we haven't got that here.

Uni: And you'd still have to attend that meeting and then hold in your mind 'oh that group might be just excellent for so-and-so'?

2: Yeah

5: We do have a great support worker with a big file that keeps everything together as well.

2: If you're physically located somewhere [in an office], we're not, but you can have a lot of info up and around you, have a big file of stuff that people can see. But otherwise it tends to just be down to people's own ways that they collect it. We keep trying to have central repositories but they're just not very easy to maintain.

They also appreciated the Sparks email, produced by Blackpool Coastal Housing (which sends updates about groups and activities, but it only covers Blackpool), and the Wyre Borough Council's annual booklet listing all its outdoor activities (which features The Bay's community engagement events and promotes its offer of nature and wellbeing sessions).

To note, the participants said they mainly get feedback from their patients rather than from The Bay itself. Sometimes this is because they've encouraged the person to self-refer, so The Bay is not aware of the link to the referrer, and the referrer does not expect any communication. But in cases where they

have made a formal referral they reported fairly minimal feedback from The Bay. However, they didn't see this as a problem because they can get updates from the patient, and, if need be, can easily contact the Nature & Wellbeing Officer.

c) Ideas for improvement

The main suggestion was to expand the delivery area for the project. In particular, the staff covering Blackpool would like to be able to refer people from Blackpool to local nature and wellbeing sessions, as the majority feel that Wyre is too far away. A prescriber also mentioned someone in the St Anne's / Lytham area who once attended and enjoyed an event run by the Wyre hub's Nature & Wellbeing Officer, and who would like to join a local group.

One of the social prescribers suggested that it would help if someone from The Bay came to one of the surgeries' monthly coffee mornings, which they hold for patients who are struggling with isolation and loneliness. She felt that meeting someone from the project would help some people to feel more comfortable about attending because they had already met someone; *"we can obviously explain what The Bay is but if they don't know the person they're going to meet there's actually an instant barrier."*

One participant had attended The Bay's registration session with their patient, but they filled in the form at the start of the session, when the person had only just met the other participants (there were only a few), which was a bit stressful. She suggested it would be better to have had some clear time to fill the form before the session, in order to meet the staff and to settle in a little before meeting other people. (This is The Bay's usual approach, it is not clear why it wasn't followed on this occasion).

In relation to getting feedback from The Bay about someone they have referred, they suggested that it would be useful for them to be updated about how many sessions someone has left, so that they can better support that person through the process of ending with The Bay and moving onto other activities. They felt that for their referrals The Bay does not need to offer that 'moving on' support because that's their job.

In regard to keeping up to date with The Bay's activities, and being reminded about it, they recommended the project sends an update email to referrers, and emails and posts simple visual communications which they can then forward or post to clients, and display in their own offices and surgeries.

3.1.9 Referral partners' online feedback

Four referrers who could not attend the focus group took up the opportunity to share their feedback by filling in an online form. They all worked for the NHS. Two had referred five or more people to The Bay, one had referred one to four people, and one had not referred anyone to the project. The latter explained they had only been in post for a couple of months and had not had any client that they considered suitable or keen to engage with The Bay.

a) What's gone well

We asked them to rate to what extent their expectations of The Bay had been met; two opted for 'reasonably well' and one said they were 'fully met'.

In response to an open question about their expectations and fit with their roles they responded:

"I really appreciate having somewhere to refer clients with mental ill health that allows them to be outdoors, in nature. I feel this offers service users more choice. Many service users will not attend 'groups indoors' as these feel intimidating. The Bay offers a refreshing alternative. Also Alex's people skills and demeanour offer a really safe welcoming space to service users."

"People have really benefitted from this service."

"I think this project is fantastic, so many are keen to attend. I have not received any feedback as yet and really need to come along to a session. I feel this will give me a better insight into what goes on at the session to relay back to the patients."

We asked all respondents how their experience of The Bay has compared to similar projects, one person said it was 'average', and three rated it as 'one of the best'. They added:

Good referral process, clear understanding of what happens on the journey to participation.

There is no other project locally that offers what the bay does and so many individuals love to be outdoors.

Team are lovely and great with service users.

As previously stated, it offers a non-threatening resource that can be outdoors. It allows attendees to feel like they are 'giving back' and making a difference. Thank you for this service.

With regard to how The Bay engages with organisations one person commented *"The team are very good at connecting and linking in with organisations in my opinion, nothing to change"*

b) Main challenges

Of the three people who had referred to The Bay, two had had cases where someone did not go on to attend sessions. In answer to the query about why this happened, and anything the project could have done differently, they answered:

"I think it was more their own anxiety and lack of motivation as the project has always received a positive response when discussing what is involved."

"Very little that The Bay could do, in my experience they work sensitively and proactively to aid inclusion and look for ways to offer support to help this."

c) Ideas for improvement

With regard to how The Bay engages with organisations, one person commented *"Generally I think they do a good job of getting people to know about them. If they had capacity they could attend more of the regular networking meetings to really get themselves embedded."* Another respondent echoed this by suggesting that staff sometimes attend NHS team meetings to promote their service. The fourth suggestion was of regular email updates in relation to venues and times and dates for the activities.

We also asked, *What, if anything, would make you more likely to refer more people to The Bay?*

Two people's response was "nothing". The other two comments were:

Being able to continue attending for longer than 6 months.

Maybe if there was some sessions that were for males and then females. When speaking to the patients they are sometimes reluctant to attend if the session is mixed, however this is not the

majority. I think if the sessions are small groups as well this reassures people and makes them feel more at ease.

3.1.10 Interview with NHS trust managers

We had a joint interview with Richard Chillery, the Lancashire & South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust's Deputy Chief Operating Officer, and Kevin O'Hara, its Partnership Development Manager. Kevin has been involved with The Bay since its inception, and both attend Steering Group meetings.

a) What's gone well

Both were very enthusiastic about The Bay, and recognised its value to the NHS, as a service which may prevent people with low level mental health from entering mental health services through to supporting patients with deteriorating mental health from having to enter inpatient mental health services. They also agreed that the Bay could provide the support which may prevent others who have been patients from the 'revolving door' of leaving and then returning to NHS patient care. They also appreciated that The Bay uses a non-medical approach, considering that while medications have a role, in general the NHS tends to over-medicalise.

With regard to referrals, they were pleased that the estimated NHS referral rate to The Bay of 26% is above many programmes and roughly on par with unpublished ongoing research nationally for NHS referrals to green prescriptions. Kevin thought that getting 21 of the Trust's practitioners along to The Bay's taster days was a good turn-out, though he realised that project staff may have felt differently as many more practitioners were invited and more had signalled their intention to come. However, he explained that the Trust's staff had unexpected conflicting priorities over the period of the taster days.

b) Main challenges

They recognised that The Bay had not yet "cracked the GP nut" and that the context of different stakeholders and voluntary sector 'competitors' is complex. The Bay's officers may need to spread their net wide because it may only land in some areas, and sometimes it comes down to forming a relationship with an individual who's interested.

They acknowledged the on-going challenge of finding accurate information about activities for social prescribing and issues in the past with keeping a directory up to date. They ruled out any investment by LSCFT in any kind of app or website due to financial barriers, but felt that the Trust's Initial Response Service (launched in March 2023) would be useful to social prescribers.

c) Ideas for improvement

One area they felt could be explored further was whether better connections can be made to and by The Bay to other nature-based groups at the point when people are discharged from NHS inpatient services if they have been involved in any nature-related sessions or finished their sessions with the Bay.

With regard to linking NHS prescribers to organisations offering wellbeing support, Kevin noted that LSCFT's Pennine Initial Response Service has someone from the community voluntary sector embedded within the service. This is a recent innovation so it is not yet clear how effective this strategy is, but it could be very beneficial to take a similar approach with The Bay project.

Richard suggested that it is important for people to approach 'the' NHS without naivety: to understand that the Trust has hundreds of parts and thousands of employees, that there are lots of unfilled posts, that staff in post are all running to stand still, and as a result it is hard to bring about change. They

suggested that The Bay’s officers need to approach each GP Practice Manager separately, to learn about their systems and services, to build relationships with key individuals, and to make it easy for them to refer to The Bay.

Richard also suggested that The Bay steering group doesn’t really need to steer the programme as he felt that The Bay staff “*know what they’re doing*”, so it could potentially be called and function as something different. The group could then use this space to develop more buy-in from its partners. This could include making the most of partners’ skills and their organisations’ roles, asking more of them, and being less polite about holding them to account. However, they also thought being critical of partners and expecting big changes would be counterproductive, instead suggesting that The Bay uses a collaborative approach with partners on very specific and achievable actions that can lead to small positive changes.

3.1.11 Accreditation and training for participants

One of the specialised level’s methods for supporting participants to develop their skills and connection to nature is through gaining formal accreditation. The following chart shows that participants had earned 51 qualifications by the end April 2023 (as one person may have gained more than one qualification this does not equate to 51 people):

Accreditation	Barrow	Morecambe	Wyre
John Muir Discovery Award (minimum time commitment of four days/25+ hours)	18	4	21
John Muir Explorer Award (minimum time commitment of eight days/50+ hours)	3		
Fork to Fork Bird Project AQA (Coppicing woodland shrubs and trees, Taking part in a bird survey, Designing and making a bird feeder, Building a bird table and feeding wild birds, with support)		2	
Nature Photography AQA			6
Outdoor First Aid		2 volunteers	1 volunteer

The project proposal had a target of 300 people receiving environmental accreditation. This aspect of the project developed slowly in the first year due to the main focus being on embedding referral pathways, and picked up in the second year. We consider that the target was too high for the initial development phase, as it would have meant almost three quarters of active participants getting a qualification, which is not achievable as courses take weeks to complete, not all participants will want to take part or attend regularly enough to complete the course, and they entail additional work for the Nature and Wellbeing Officers. However, providing training opportunities definitely has value for participants, and will remain part of the project in its next phase.

3.1.12 Blueprint top tips – specialised level

3.1.12.1 Blueprint top tips – preparation and recruiting participants

- ✓ Allow time to develop and establish the project, setting achievable phased targets, particularly if you are starting from scratch.
- ✓ When setting targets remember that a significant proportion of referred people are likely to not attend; make efforts to connect with newly referred people and to encourage them to attend, but

recognise that some (maybe a fifth to two fifths) will not, especially in the initial development phase.

- ✓ Ensure all staff have mental health first aid training, Outdoor First Aid certification, health and safety training, and relevant environmental knowledge including safe tool use and session planning.
- ✓ Accept referrals from multiple sources, including people making a direct approach without any referrer.
- ✓ Run taster sessions for referrers to experience what you are offering.
- ✓ Occasionally attend any local sessions run by referral organisations where you can meet and engage with a group of potential participants.
- ✓ Once someone has been referred, send the name and phone number of the staff member who is going to make contact, as some people will not answer a phone number they don't recognise.
- ✓ Consider making an explanatory video for the first step of the onboarding process, so that prospective participants see a friendly face and do not need to do a lot of reading.
- ✓ Use the registration process to understand a prospective participant's needs and to check that the project can safely include and be of benefit to them. If needed, add a condition, for example, if someone needs one-to-one support then make it a condition that a support worker also attends.
- ✓ Say "no" when necessary, for example, if someone's participation is likely to have a negative impact on others in the group, or cannot safely be managed. A useful tool here when unsure is an individual risk assessment. Going through this process enables you to consider objectively your ability to manage any risks and any reasonable accommodations that might be possible.
- ✓ Encourage the referrer to accompany the participant to the registration meeting, this ensures the prescriber understands the offer fully, and that staff and the prescriber form a relationship and together offer better on-going support.
- ✓ Streamline the on-boarding as much as possible, and explain that it's about getting to know each other for the best outcome; for example, to be aware of each individual's triggers and vulnerabilities (including physical limitations) in order to support them to get the most out of their participation. Don't cut corners and invite people to just show up without any assessment.
- ✓ When needed encourage the prescriber or a friend of the participant to accompany them to their first session, as getting over the hurdle of attending for the first time can scupper people's participation.
- ✓ Keep in touch with the prescriber, so that they are informed about the person's progress and are also reminded of your project for future clients.
- ✓ Develop and use a checklist to make sure you complete all steps before each session, take the right kit to the session, and do all tasks afterwards.
- ✓ Consider offering different options, such as short, themed blocks, or sessions for a clients of a certain service, as well as the small group sessions.

3.1.12.2 Blueprint top tips – running sessions

- ✓ If possible, ensure there are always two leaders at each session, so that one can run the session if an individual requires unplanned one-on-one attention.
- ✓ Give group leaders freedom in what they offer, to suit their skill sets, but using the five ways to wellbeing as the basis. The activities will also need to vary to fit with local opportunities and with the participants' interests and abilities.
- ✓ Make sessions person-centred and offer options within a session so, for example, if someone prefers to do work alone they can do.

- ✓ Have some mixed groups, as participants tend to benefit from the variety and the perspective that they get from meeting others facing different challenges.
- ✓ You may also want to have some cohort-specific groups, if working with a partner, and when attendance is supported by being part of a particular peer group, such as for young people.
- ✓ Aim for a group of 10 to 12 people, with the expectation that six to eight turn up to any session. Smaller sessions can also be effective, but if there are only a few participants they miss some of the benefits of interaction and peer support.
- ✓ Remember, if you are targeting underserved communities and people with poor mental health it will take time to build active groups, and attendance will ebb and flow, and this is OK.
- ✓ Share practical ideas for mindfulness that participants can use at any time.
- ✓ Provide a range of activities, even within the same session, to suit different interests and skills.
- ✓ Get outdoors! Support participants to learn to enjoy all kinds of weather, and to not hide from 'bad' weather. Use indoor spaces as needed, but try to get outdoors on every session.
- ✓ Ask participants and volunteers to work to a behaviour code of conduct to manage behaviour and language which may alienate individuals or cause conflict in the group. This helps support groups to be proactively kind and welcoming places.
- ✓ Create a positive vibe, generating enthusiasm by being enthusiastic, and explicitly giving participants feedback about their achievements and the virtues they have shown.
- ✓ Be explicit about the five ways to wellbeing, and add activities as necessary to cover all five. For example, explaining that while cleaning the beach we are also connecting with others, being physically active, being mindful as we focus on the task, and giving by contributing to improving the environment. Then adding an element of learning by showing participants something on the beach they may not know about, or sharing some local history.
- ✓ Ensure that the sessions are in some way beneficial to nature, and that participants can identify and celebrate their contribution, and are supported to build an appreciation for the natural environment and how to safely and responsibly access wild spaces.
- ✓ Don't overload with sessions; a full-time officer can't run a session every day of the week and give due attention to supporting individuals, communicating with partners, developing new partner relationships and keeping on top of administration. Three regular groups a week is manageable, allowing some flexibility for one-off activities.

3.1.12.3 Blueprint top tips – supporting each participant's journey

- ✓ Use some kind of system to track each participant from initial referral to registration and attendance, adding notes and reflections, and setting reminders for when to review things with them.
- ✓ Be explicit about how many sessions participants can expect to attend from the outset, and at reviews with each individual. This may depend on your organisation's position within your context, for example, if you're aiming to be an initial gateway into the green sector or if you're supporting people into long term volunteering. The Bay uses a 'budget' of around 12 sessions per person rather than a time frame (eg 3 months) because illness and other issues can interrupt attendance.
- ✓ If possible, be flexible about the number of sessions to meet people's needs. In some cases, and if you do not have waiting lists, you may want some individuals to have more sessions. Others may need fewer, and can benefit and exit before reaching their 'budget'.

- ✓ Provide scaffolding support to participants, such as helping a participant to find an unfamiliar location, but also encourage independence: staff must have the journey and the 'graduation' on to other things in mind from the outset.
- ✓ Use reviews to both reflect on their progress and look forward; it's important to support participants to make plans for their next steps well before they finish.
- ✓ Encourage participants to use the five ways to wellbeing in their day-to-day life, to seek opportunities and activities that will be of benefit to them outside of the sessions, and which they can draw on during and after their journey.
- ✓ Support regular attendance, but accept that often people will stop coming, or come sporadically, or say they are coming to a session but then not show up; participants are typically dealing with multiple challenges which undermine reliability and consistency. Record any relevant information so that the project can see if any patterns emerge.
- ✓ Remember that you can refer people back to social prescribers or the NHS for wider support whilst they continue their nature-based journey with you. People with poor mental health often have complex lives and need support from different sources.

3.1.12.4 Blueprint top tips – activities to include in sessions

- Awareness raising of plastic pollution via activities such as nurdle hunts
- Campaigning and understanding about the promotion and protection of marine environments
- Promoting the new Marine and Coastal Code
- Linking to existing coastal survey work, such as seal counts or sabellaria monitoring
- Pollinator surveys to highlight the importance of coastal wildflower species
- Sustainable foraging and then cooking the food including cooking over a fire if appropriate
- Creating wildflower corridors and deadwood habitat
- Tree and hedgerow planning and management
- Planting native plants
- Embedding old Christmas trees or planting species as part of dune protection
- Invasive species removal
- Making bird boxes, bug hotels, hedge habitat, etc
- Litter pick/beach clean
- Citizen science (eg surveying shark egg cases, rock pools, sea watches, sabellaria) and submitting the data
- Alternative activities like laughter yoga and beach art
- Learning to identify species of different fauna and flora, including using the iNaturalist app
- Gaining a John Muir award through doing actions for nature

3.1.12.5 Blueprint top tips – working with Wellbeing Volunteers

- ✓ Invite suitable participants to develop into volunteers, who can provide peer support to new participants, if that will help your delivery, but remember that proper management of volunteers takes time, skill and effort, so they are not a free resource. It is also sometimes beneficial for people to volunteer in a different group to their own participation so they get to properly work through their own personal development.
- ✓ Use a written volunteer role description to explain what's involved and any benefits in terms of training or payment for expenses, and your and their expectations.

- ✓ Make sure they finish with their group, and understand their new role, before becoming a volunteer with a new group.
- ✓ Manage volunteers as you would a paid member of staff, for example, valuing their time, and holding regular reviews.
- ✓ Build in regular training opportunities, both to support safe delivery but also to for particular areas of personal and professional development each volunteer might have relating to both people and nature.
- ✓ Involve volunteers in planning and design and training as well as delivery. The Bay have built in seasonal planning days and the opportunity to come together both as small local groups and as a whole project.
- ✓ Ensure volunteers have opportunities to debrief after activities so they aren't taking issues home with them.

3.2 Targeted level work through community engagement sessions

Summary: The project has engaged with almost twice as many people as planned, using an interesting variety of events, either open to the public or run for specific community groups. We cannot say if it delivered on the target's small print that those engaged are *people at risk of social exclusion and isolation*, unless we take the position that every person faces those risks. Nonetheless, among people who filled in a feedback form 26% came to the event alone, and 90% reported meeting new people at the event.

Our analysis of data from feedback forms shows very high ('9 out of 10') levels of satisfaction among participants regarding their enjoyment of the event, the event's location, their rating of staff and volunteers, and how engaged with nature they felt. 60% indicated they had not attended a similar event previously; we don't know the proportion for all participants at all events, but if it were 60% the project would have brought around 5,600 people into new engagement with nature. 99% of respondents said they would like to attend another event. Overall, quantitative data from the feedback forms strongly supports the idea that participants were able to access all five ways to wellbeing, and at impressive rates. That is further supported by their qualitative responses to open questions, which contained a lot of positive comments about the events, the staff, their enjoyment, and learning about nature.

The Community Engagement Officers enjoy the freedom they have to form local partnerships and to shape their events. Major challenges for them include having to plan a long way ahead and the danger of becoming overcommitted. They also spoke about the challenges of engaging middle-aged and older men, and young people, who tend to be under-represented at their events.

Volunteers who help at community engagement events appreciated the events and the professionalism of The Bay's staff. However, they were unclear about the purpose and structure of the project, and felt the project should take a more strategic approach to informing, involving and managing community engagement volunteers.

The project engaged with 9,380 participants over 19 months, against a target of 6,000 people in 24 months. Per month this is a 197% fulfilment of the target: a mean of 494 people per month against a target of 250.

The project proposal specified that the people engaged would be *at risk of social exclusion and isolation*, but no attempt was made to assess this at point of entry, instead entry was left open and the focus was on targeting groups for whom this might be more likely to apply. If we take the view that everyone faces those risks then the target is clearly met (but the wording is superfluous). If we instead recognise that there is a spectrum of risk then it is not clear to what extent the target was met. Project officers and volunteers recognise that some event participants are not obviously at risk – for example, seemingly well-functioning families who are integrated in community life and who are not struggling financially. But certainly among the 9,380 participants there were many people with higher risk, or, indeed, who actually are isolated and excluded. (Project Managers indicate that the project may, in the future, run fewer events for lower numbers of people, but with a greater focus on development of individuals.)

The kinds of events that the officers have run are varied, and include working with local experts and local groups such as Beach Buddies and naturalist groups. They include:

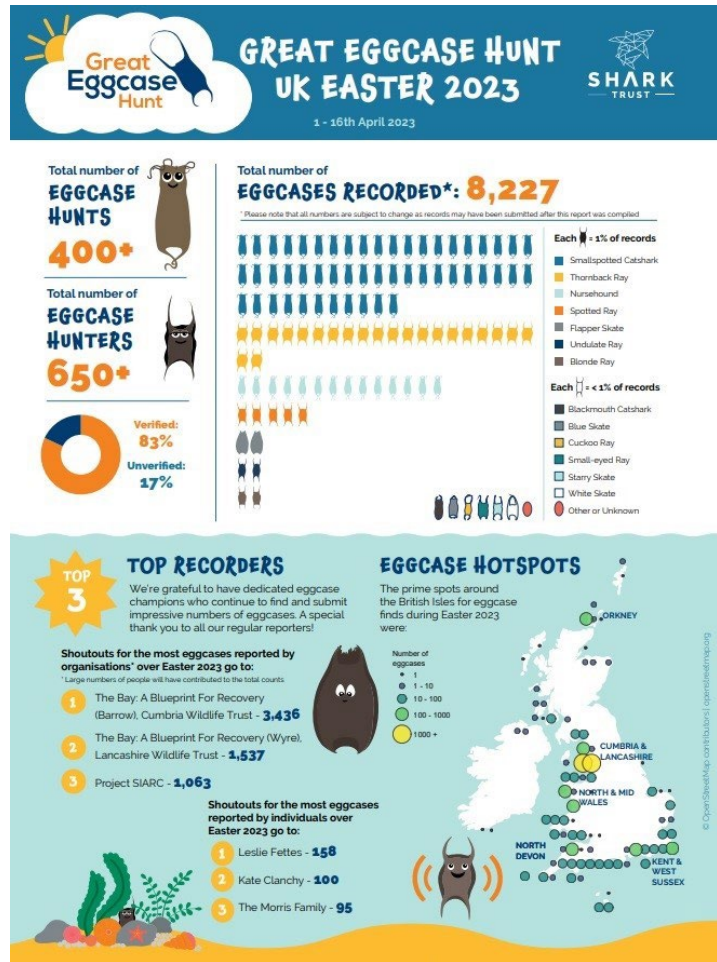
- Large scale family friendly events such as shark egg case hunts, beach bingo and beach cleans;
- Smaller outdoor events such as sea watches, bird watching, storytime on the beach, and walks (using different themes as a focus, such as wellbeing walks, heritage walks);
- Species identification and monitoring events, enabling people to learn how to become part of citizen science actions for conservation;
- Conservation work with local council rangers;
- Outdoor artistic events such as beach sand sculpting and sketching;
- Indoor family friendly crafting;
- A series of photography workshops;
- Online talks;
- Bespoke events for groups, such as a children's disability group, and a dementia support group;
- One-off events for community groups such as the girl guides, a library and care home;
- Work with primary school children;
- Interactions at public fairs, such as using a portable rockpool to interest people and tell them about the project;
- Public planting days;
- Tours of Rossall Point Tower;
- Running a stall at festivals such as Tram Sunday with activities such as wildlife trust wordle, butterfly and insect hunts, and bee hotel making
- Doing coastal surveying to track changes in the coastline;
- Work to support young people interested in a career in conservation.

The following infographic from the Shark Trust's "Great Eggcase Hunt UK Easter 2023" shows the impact that The Bay can have through large scale events, with CWT and LWT, operating as The Bay, recording the highest two counts of shark egg cases, and together accounting for 60% of the national tally.

3.2.1 Feedback from the participant survey

This analysis is from the 382 forms that were filled in. Note that, with 6,524 adult participants, fewer than 6% of adult participants gave feedback. There are various reasons for this, eg:

- The feedback form wasn't finalised until May 2022;
- When people attend as a group typically one adult fills the form on behalf of the group;
- It isn't appropriate to hand out the form (which takes a few minutes to fill) after a very short interaction, for example, someone looking at the portable rock pool;
- Sometimes participants need to rush off, or are dealing with children, so don't have time to fill it in, or just don't want to fill it in;
- Cold, wet and windy weather makes it harder to get feedback at outdoor events;
- At very popular events you need a lot of clipboards and volunteers to get a lot of filled forms;
- It has taken time for staff to get in the habit of handing out forms.



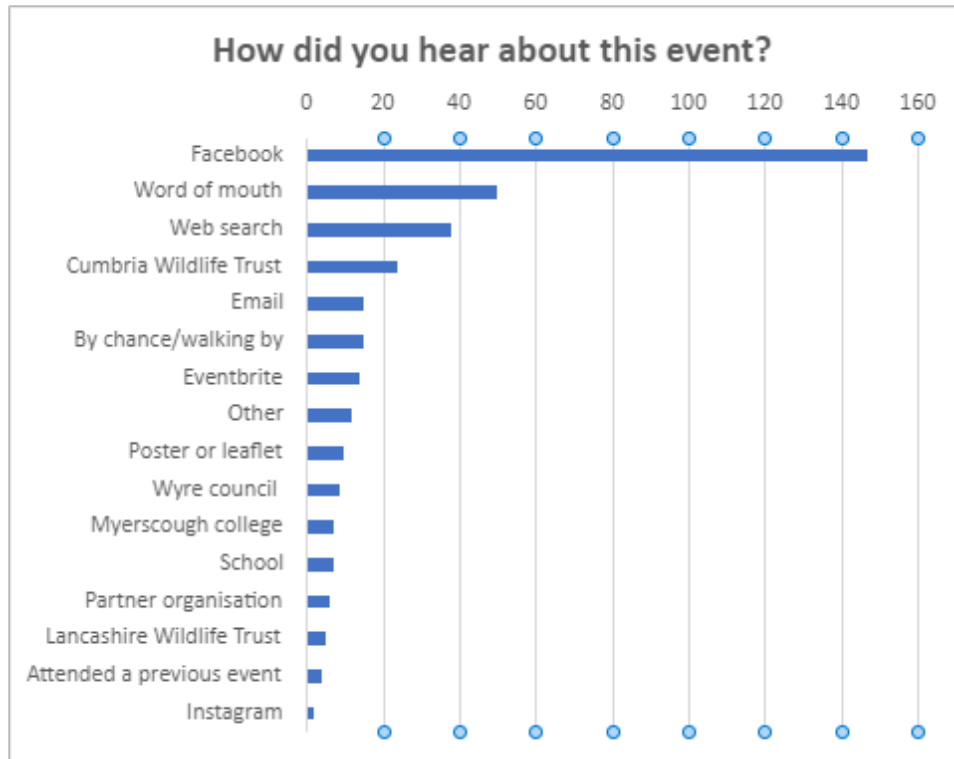
The staff did experiment with gathering participants' emails and sending them a survey after the event, but this resulted in a low response. We note that it isn't necessary to gather data from every participant, as that would generate a lot of additional administration without a great deal of benefit to the project.

While the following analysis from the 382 forms are not representative of all event participants nor statistically significant, they do give us some insight into the experience of several hundred individuals and groups of people.

a) How participants heard about the event

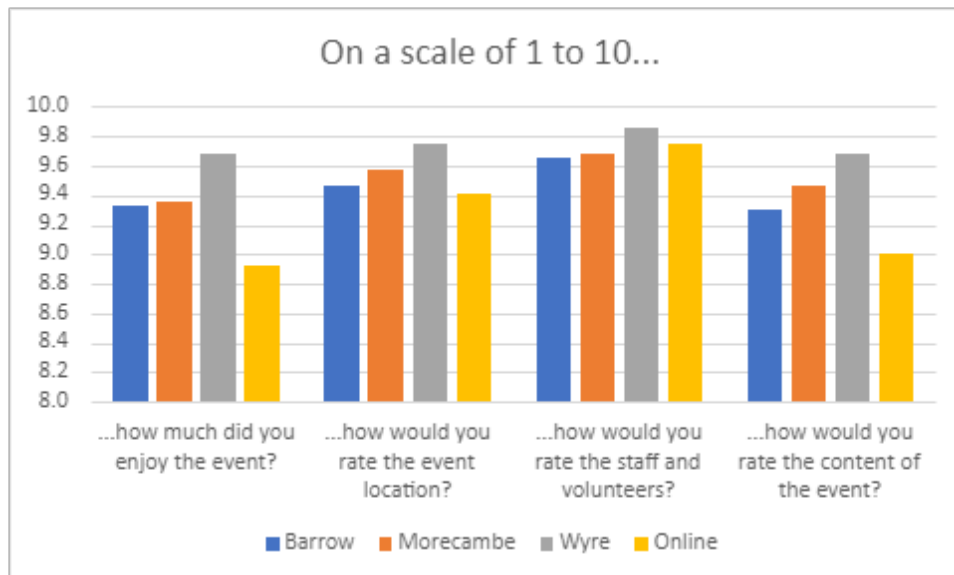
365 people stated on their feedback form how they had heard about the event. As the following chart shows, Facebook was predominant. Except for *Word of mouth* and *By chance/walking by*, all the means of hearing about the event originate with The Bay's officers, who create posts, send their events to their Wildlife Trusts, councils and other events listings, promote them via Eventbrite, and distribute posters and leaflets.

We note that some of the other categories are ambiguous: for example, *Email* could refer to an email from The Bay, or from a Wildlife Trust or other source.



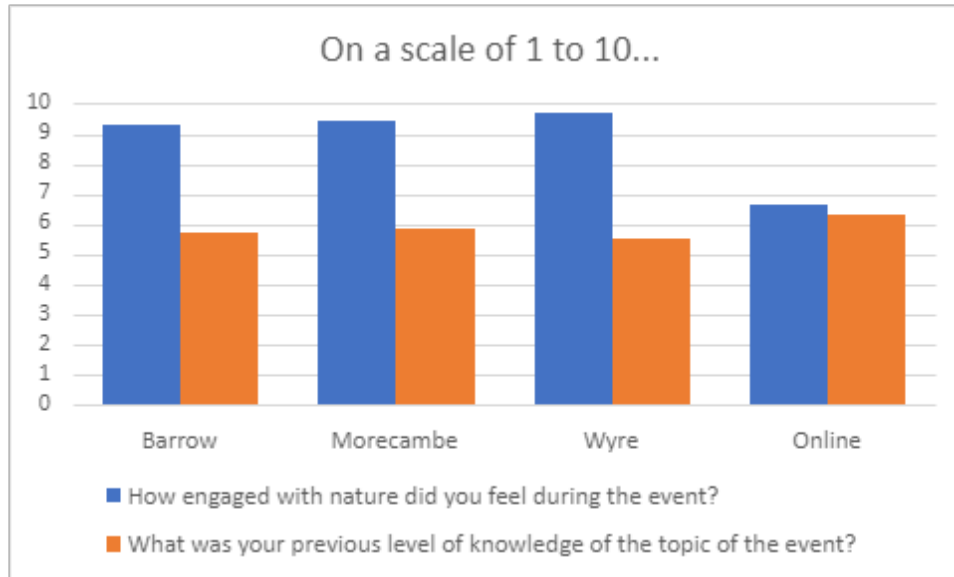
b) Participants' rating of the events

As the following chart shows, the mean score exceeded nine out of ten for all three hubs over four aspects of enjoyment, location, staff and volunteers, and content (we have used a scale in the chart that begins at 8 out of 10 as none of the mean scores were less than 8). The highest scores are for events run by staff from the Wyre hub, and lowest satisfaction is for the enjoyment and content of the online events.



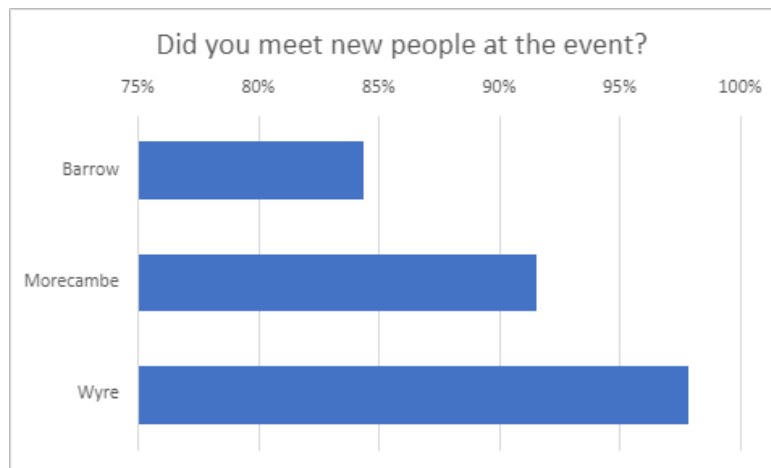
c) Engagement and learning

As the following chart shows from respondents using the updated form, there was barely any difference between the hubs for the participants' self-assessed scores for how engaged they felt or for their previous level of knowledge, though it is notable (and not surprising) that the online participants reported a much lower rating of engagement with nature.



Responses to related questions - *Did the event help or encourage you to take notice of the natural world? Were you inspired to take action for nature? Did you learn something about the topic at the event?* - yielded highly positive responses of between 94% and 100% from each hub and online participants.

For all hubs on average 90% of respondents who filled in the updated form reported meeting new people at the event, a significant outcome given the project's focus on reducing isolation. As the following chart shows, the data seems to fit with the Community Engagement Officers' observation that people are less like to meet new people at the larger events, which have mainly occurred in Barrow.



Barrow’s mean of 84% is largely the result of 58 feedback forms from an Easter egg case hunt, an event at which just 74% of respondents reported meeting new people. However, three quarters of people reporting meeting new people is still impressive, particularly at an event designed to appeal to family groups.

In answer to the question (on the updated form) *Have you attended an event like this before?* the mean for all respondents replying ‘yes’ was 40%, so first timers were in the majority. There was little variation between the hubs, with Wyre having a lower number of first timers (54%) compared to 63% for Barrow and Morecambe and 67% for online participants. The follow-up question *Would you attend an event like this again?* yielded 281 responses of ‘yes’ and just two responses of ‘no’. This indicates that the project is delivering in terms of bringing new people into contact with nature (not just ‘the usual suspects’), and with sufficient enjoyment that they plan to come to similar events in the future. We cannot say how many of all the people who attended events had not done so before, but if the proportion were similar to those who gave feedback then the project would have brought around 5,600 into new engagement with nature and the intention of re-engaging in the future.

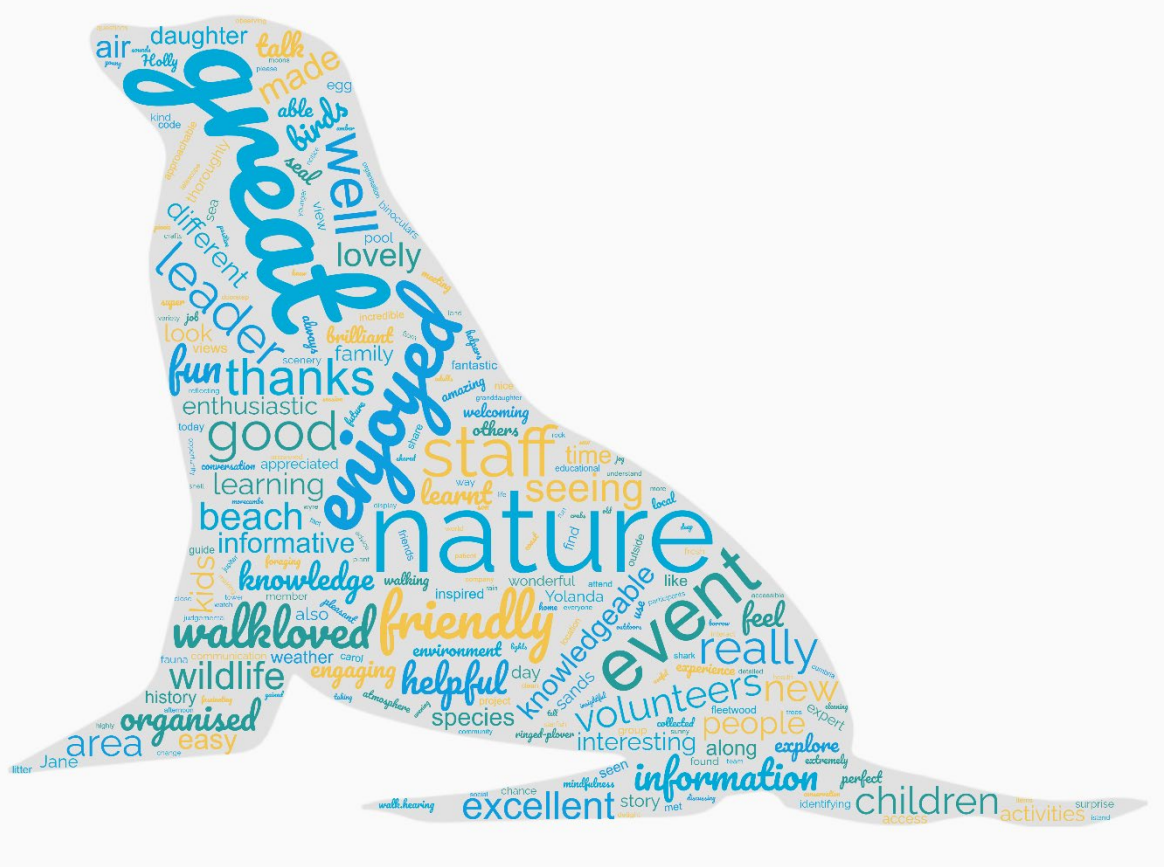
In summary, the following graphic illustrates the impressive rates at which the community engagement events helped the respondents to address the five ways to wellbeing:



d) Responses to open questions

274 respondents answered the open question *What did you enjoy the most?* about the event they had attended; the following wordcloud presents a visual analysis of their text⁹:

⁹ The wordcloud excludes words used only once.



The 274 positive comments fall into the following categories:

- ★ Compliments about the staff and volunteers, in particular their friendliness and helpfulness. For example, *“Really enjoyable event for me and my daughter. It was fun and educational. The staff were really welcoming and engaged throughout the event. All 3 staff were an asset to your service.”* and *“The Outdoors is terrific, especially when introduced by a non-judgemental, knowledgeable, amiable and approachable person like Jane. It was thoroughly enjoyable. 100%.”*
- ★ Praise for events as being *“well organised”*.
- ★ Appreciation of staff and volunteers’ knowledge and ability to share it with others, such as *“They were very knowledgeable and gave many great tips and advice and thoroughly enjoyed my time.”* and *“Holly and Yolanda are great and very knowledgeable. They are brilliant with the children and adults alike being educational, friendly and informative but never condescending.”*
- ★ Pleasure in exploring and learning, such as *“Thank you. I didn’t know the area at all and am delighted to have discovered it.”* and *“My 10 year old son had the most amazing time gaining knowledge and engaging in conversations about wildlife and plant life and conservation. The event fuelled his desire to learn about his local area.”*
- ★ Comments about returning to do the activities and sharing learning with others such as *“I feel really inspired to learn even more about the plant life, edible and otherwise, growing along the coastline and will definitely be taking a few friends on coastal foraging trips, as I’m sure they will love it as*

much as I did.” and “Thanks. When we normally go the beach with my granddaughter it is just to play in the sand. Next time, we’ll have a look in the rockpools.”

- ★ Comments about wanting The Bay to run more activities, and wanting to attend more activities.

Respondents were also prompted to add comments about what they didn’t like. 70 people gave a response, but 28 of those were comments about there being nothing they disliked and a further 9 were about the weather or the clothing they had brought. In total 33 people gave some critical feedback. Their comments concerned the following:

- Eight complaints relating to how a walk across the sands run by a partner organisation was led (that not enough information was shared, and communication on the walk was poor).
- Issues about timings and lengths of walks (too slow, too short a distance, took less time than advertised), including the positive criticism of wanting the event to last longer.
- Three people said it was a shame there weren’t more participants.
- Two people noted that access (to different events) was not easy without a car.
- Two were disappointed not to see the species that they were looking for.
- 13 people made 13 very specific and different criticisms.

The form also invited respondents to make suggestions as to how the event could have been improved, and the input from 39 people is summarised here:

- To do better promotion.
- To have more events, events that last longer, and more regular events.
- To try and run events to the timings advertised.
- To make sure the event matches the description.
- To run bird watching events at quieter times (the event had coincided with a coastal fishing competition).
- Run a strandline survey event slightly later, to allow school children to take part.
- At an egg case hunt, to reduce the queue by giving the talk outside to many people at once.
- At a dark skies event, to have the people in charge of the telescopes more easily identifiable, and to share information to connect participants to the local astronomy group.
- To have information sheets for all participants about what to look out for, and to help identify species.
- At a sunset walk, to ask people to gather and share what they found, rather than play a game.
- At a sea watch, to have something more interactive for young participants to do.
- For an online event, make it clear that it can be watched before or after, not only at the advertised time.
- At Time in Nature event for people with dementia, to have refreshments earlier, before crafting.

3.2.2 Focus group with Community Engagement Officers

This group interview was with the Community Engagement Officers for Barrow and Wyre, but did not include Morecambe as that post was vacant during the period the evaluation was carried out.

a) What’s worked well

The officers described their work as *“Reducing loneliness and isolation by getting people involved in nature’s recovery.”* Within that task they have, and very much value, the freedom to decide on what activities to run, and for whom. As one said, *“It’s nice, you can do a wide range of events... because*

we're not charging you can look at where the need is rather than think about who can pay. And also you very rarely have to turn down people if they ask if you can do an event for their organisation."

They noted that shark egg case hunts, with chocolate egg prizes, are the most popular event. They also spoke about their sense of different events in terms of reducing loneliness and isolation:

"In terms of biggest numbers then the unlimited number ones for families in the holidays tend to go really well. And yet some really nice events have been where the numbers are capped and it feels more like it's in keeping with The Bay's aims. So, for example, we did a walk and a picnic on Easter Sunday and it was capped at 20 people, I felt that that worked really well with The Bay's aims of reducing isolation because it was on Easter day, some people came alone and would have been alone otherwise, and people of all ages were being brought together. So obviously if it's a massive event then you know people have turned up and it's gone well. But small events can really align nicely with The Bay programme's aims and values."

One officer explained her tactic regarding meeting engagement targets and the task of engaging with more isolated people:

"...most months I do what I think is going to be a big family event. Because you know it's still useful, you can have kids and be isolated, and also it gets the word out and stuff...So if you do, for example, a big egg case hunt, then you've got your numbers, so then for the other events you can really think like 'ok we don't need to worry about numbers we can look at where the kind of need really is'."

For promotion both had used a variety of methods, and felt that their Facebook posts brought in more people than other methods. They also noted the need for posters and leaflets to reach people who don't use social media, and the importance of sharing information about future events with participants at the end of an event.

Both run their events with the hub trainee and appreciated the small group of reliable volunteers that they call on for help. They sometimes also bring in the Programme Manager to assist at events.

b) Main challenges

Overall they recognised the challenge of reaching isolated people who are less likely to join an event, and were aware that men, and in particular middle-aged and older men, tend to be under-represented at events. They also spoke about the challenge of reaching and sustaining work with young people.

Another challenge is the risk of becoming overcommitted and needing to say 'no' to requests to run events.

In Wyre the officer needs to plan events long in advance so they can feature in the council's annual [Explore Outdoors](#) publication. While this is useful to collaborate with the council and its wildlife rangers, the need to plan in advance and to gain the council's approval for events means The Bay's programme in Wyre might be less responsive than in Barrow. For example, in Barrow the officer was able to try running events with a Men's Shed group, as part of the push to reach middle-aged men, and was also able to drop that approach when it didn't prove to be fruitful.

Regarding local autonomy and planning, both officers felt they would prefer to locally manage a dedicated budget to know what budget they can spend on their activities, rather than having to make a request before spending any significant sum.

c) Ideas for improvement

Both officers were both happy to operate from their homes and without a physical hub, feeling that there was no obvious location for a hub (somewhere close to the public and nature), and that it would be distraction to have to staff the hub. They preferred to do their admin at home or in the library and spend all their remaining time running sessions.

They recognised that they might benefit from better sharing of ideas and resources between the three hubs, that they might potentially save themselves some work if they could import the framework for an event that has proved to be effective from another hub, rather than starting from scratch.

One also noted that with better use of local volunteers they would not need to divert the Programme Manager from his role.

3.2.3 Focus group with community engagement volunteers

Unfortunately no volunteers were able to attend from Wyre; three Barrow volunteers and three Morecambe volunteers took part in the focus group.

a) What's worked well

The volunteers very much praised the staff they had worked with, noting their enthusiasm, energy and good communication.

They were all people who appreciate nature and how it benefits them, and take pleasure in sharing that with others through The Bay. They also had a good deal of relevant expertise between them. As one said:

"I enjoy what I'm doing. If I didn't I would be there. But also to see young people - and this is one of the negatives I think, we're still missing the teenagers and I don't know why - but to see young people going round the rockpools and that or picking up seaweed 'look at this!' Magic! Can't put a price on that. They're there, they're getting fresh air, they're getting exercise, they're communicating with their parents. And to help that I think is brilliant. I love that."

Another commented:

"Well I enjoy watching wildlife and taking part in the walks, going round explaining to some people who may not know how to use binoculars, how to use them....And at the end of the day I just get the thrill I suppose, it's not the right word, but the enjoyment that I've helped somebody to improve their life by switching back out of the world as we know it into just their own world and enjoy the space and time of the wildlife. If you want to find anything just go to a wood or along the prom, sit back, stand there for five minutes and just enjoy the views and hear the wildlife around you. And it changes you."

The felt that events not only connected people to nature but also promoted sociability and action:

"I also remember a litter pick, which you might think well that's, you know everybody just doing the task, but even so there were conversations going on and there were couples, there were older people, there were a few families who were deliberately picking up fishing gear and the children with their environmental awareness now, climate change awareness, were absolutely into it because they were going to clean up their beach, every last tiny bit!"

b) Main challenges

The participants felt unclear about what the overall project's aims are and the objectives for each event, while acknowledging that public events can have value:

1: I think, that's what I was imagining we would be doing, working with people who had been isolated, particularly after COVID, which is what was all on The Bay website. Whereas a lot of what we do was 'open sesame, everybody come', and some events we have 250 people at! And a lot of them are people who could access the internet, very highly mobile, 'this looks great for the kids!'...

2: Something to do in the holidays!

3: ... Probably some of those families have never been to that location, or would never go there without that event, because sometimes people kind of need an event to go to something.

1: I actually talked to a young woman at an art event, who's got a couple of children, a baby and a toddler, who I know, she comes from a really quite poor background in terms of disposable income. And I asked her 'what did you think about The Bay project'? And she said 'well (a) it was free, and (b) it was well organised'. And I said 'well, what do you get out of it?' And she said 'we all learnt something more about nature'. A lot of people went through that day, we just couldn't give everybody the attention that we kind of wanted to. And yet she still felt it was valuable.

The participants had useful critiques and ideas for how the project could further develop and work with volunteers, asking for more communication about what's going on outside their groups, and more involvement for those that want it. (Since we informally shared their feedback with managers The Bay has established a calendar of seasonal planning and get-togethers with staff and volunteers, and had their first meeting in June. These regular events were something which, pre-Covid, happened as part of LWT's Myplace project, but had not yet been put in place during the establishment phase of The Bay).

They were also confused about the project's structure – the role of the two Wildlife Trusts and the Eden Project – and had different experiences in terms of being kept informed about project activities and developments. The departure of Morecambe's Community Engagement Officer, with the post vacant since February 2023, had led to fewer events and fewer participants, and less reliable communications.

c) Ideas for improvement

They suggested that the project needs to invest more, and have a better strategy towards, Community Engagement volunteers, including effective and consistent communication with them. (These ideas chime with the direction that the project is taking, through collaborative quarterly skills days where officers and volunteers create development plans and share training.)

One participant also suggested that the officers could be trained in different approaches and methods of community engagement and volunteer management.

3.2.4 Training for volunteers

The project intended to provide Mental Health First Aid Training to ten volunteers; this is the same Level 3 course that all The Bay's staff have taken. Whilst this offer remains open the training requires two days, and many people didn't feel ready for that level of mental health training. Instead, The Bay offered a shorter accredited Mental Health Awareness training, which, by the end of April 2023, had been completed by 12 volunteers.

The project has also offered other training opportunities to community engagement volunteers, including Outdoor First Aid, Safeguarding, Health and Safety, and Wildworks AQAs for those considering developing a career in the sector. However, take up has been low, with three trained in first aid and two in coastal foraging. This may be because community engagement volunteers don't have a regular commitment to the project, or because they tend to be older and well educated, so do not see the need for the training, or want to give up the time to do it. (Interestingly, in June nine of them did travel to the skills day at Brockholes, suggesting they are simply discerning about how they spend their time and found that offer more appealing). More commonly they have had informal skills-specific training as needed, such as around coastal foraging and how to lead a shoresearch.

We also note that in Morecambe three former participants of the nature and wellbeing sessions have expanded their volunteering from supporting those sessions to also helping with community engagement events. They have had been trained in safeguarding, mental health awareness and have received skills specific training.

Having started developing the volunteer base from the grassroots, locally, the project is now at the point where it has an enthusiastic group of volunteers, some of whom are keen to take an active role in programme level design, monitoring and engagement. At the time of writing the project is responding to this through the new quarterly skills days, and involvement of some volunteers in the project's Steering Group.

3.2.5 Blueprint top tips – targeted level

3.2.5.1 Blueprint top tips – community engagement strategies

- ✓ Give officers flexibility about the content of their events and how they engage with community members.
- ✓ Keep the programme focus in mind (in this case, reducing isolation and loneliness), and don't be afraid to turn down requests that don't fit, for example, to work with schools.
- ✓ Events can be open to the public, or more focussed, such as events for an established youth group or dementia support group.
- ✓ Consider working with other local organisations to run events, such as local wildlife rangers, Natural England, and community groups.
- ✓ Expect to be in demand and to need to say 'no' to some requests.
- ✓ Recruit and nurture volunteers and, as appropriate, give them more of a role than just carrying equipment; for example, if they have expertise give them the chance to share it.
- ✓ Ensure volunteers understand the purpose of the project, and allow them to help shape events by contributing their time and expertise. Enable each volunteer to take on ownership.
- ✓ Use a range of promotional methods, including physical posters and leaflets, social media posts, local event listings, and radio coverage.
- ✓ Exploit positive experiences by getting new attendees' contact details, or asking them to follow your social media accounts, so you can promote future events to them. You can also do this through your sign-up platform, for those participants who do register in advance.
- ✓ Plan and publicise events in advance, but ideally also keep some flexibility, so that approaches that don't work can be dropped or modified.
- ✓ Consider giving taster sessions to local organisations, such as faith groups and youth groups, particularly early in the project before you have established visibility in the community.

3.2.5.2 Blueprint top tips – running community sessions

- ✓ Use a checklist to systematically tick off tasks that need doing before, during and after each event, and a kit list to make sure you have the right equipment.
- ✓ Meet with volunteers before the event to check everyone understands their roles.
- ✓ Make it easy for people to sign up in advance, or to join in on the day. Be prepared for a lot of people joining in who did not sign up!
- ✓ If the event has a limit on participation or any other limits (eg dogs, or children) be clear about that in your advertising.
- ✓ Ensure that the sessions are in some way beneficial to nature.

3.2.5.3 Blueprint top tips – ideas for in-person community sessions

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▫ Code breaking and nature's patterns▫ Litter picking/beach clean▫ Beach bingo/scavenger hunt▫ Geo-caching▫ Citizen science through strandline, seawatch and butterfly surveys, including uploading the data▫ Rhododendron and balsam bashing▫ Crabbing▫ Story time▫ Arts & crafts▫ Mini marine biologist▫ Rockpooling and UV rockpooling▫ Portable rock pool▫ Shark egg case hunt (with easter chocolate egg prizes)▫ Dune den day▫ Mud and pond dipping | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▫ Seed, bulb, plug, hedgerow and tree planting▫ Conservation careers: work experience for teenagers▫ Walks with a focus: wellbeing, autumn colours, sunset, trees, birds, wildflowers, discovery ramble, local history, local geology, walk across the sands▫ Stargazing/dark skies▫ Winter waders▫ Invasive species event▫ Sand sculptures and sand art▫ Coastal foraging▫ Sketching▫ Heritage event▫ Geology event▫ Photography sessions▫ Treasure hunt▫ Making bird or bat boxes, and bug hotels |
|---|--|

3.3 Whole population work

Summary: The project has achieved a lot in establishing an attractive, informative and up-to-date website, and in building the use of social media by the whole team to communicate with the wider population. Using some very rough calculations¹⁰, we estimate that perhaps 1.5% of The Bay's households are following The Bay on social media. However, without embarking on new research to compare The Bay with similar projects, it is difficult to rate the extent of its achievements.

We can say with certainty that the target of having all 344,640 local residents accessing opportunities to self-serve and interact with their local nature has not been met. However, in our view this was an aspiration rather than an achievable or measurable target, and it is surprising that the funder did not ask for it be changed. For example, the target could have focused on the number of outputs that the

¹⁰ The average household size for the UK in 2021 was 2.4, dividing The Bay's population of 344,640 by that gives us around 144,500 households. The total number of social media followers as at the end of April 2023 was 2,725; however some of those will be double counted (individuals following on more than one platform, more than one follower in the same household) and some may not live in The Bay. As the total followers divided by households equals 1.9% we suggest that 1.5% may be a reasonable estimate.

project would make available to the whole population, and the reach that they aimed to achieve in terms of views and downloads.

The project proposal also contained a target of *2,000 self-led actions for nature* over 12 months, which became *3,000 wider community individuals engaged in positive nature activities* over 24 months. However, we have no way of knowing how many actions for nature have been undertaken, nor by how many individuals. This is a gap that the project's managers are currently addressing, for example by making specific calls to action around existing campaigns, such as the [Wildlife Trusts' 30 Days Wild](#), and having methods in place to attempt to measure the response of those who sign up, including a self-reporting tool on The Bay's website.

The third and most expansive level of The Bay's strategy is to serve the entire local population of Morecambe Bay – estimated at 344,640 people - supporting opportunities for 'nature for everyone'. The method for this aspect of the work is to provide 'self-serve' ideas through the project's website and social media, encouraging people to spend time in nature and to undertake actions for nature. The target for two years of the project is that 3,000 wider community individuals become engaged in positive nature activities. Delivery for this aspect is mainly the responsibility of LWT's Communications Officer, who has three days a week assigned to The Bay, though most of the online content has been produced by or with staff in the hubs.

3.3.1 Data from the project

a) Website

The project began by having information about The Bay on a page on LWT's website, and launched its own website www.thebay.org.uk in January 2022. It's a well-presented site with good quality photos, text in relatively plain English, and a moderate amount of text per page.

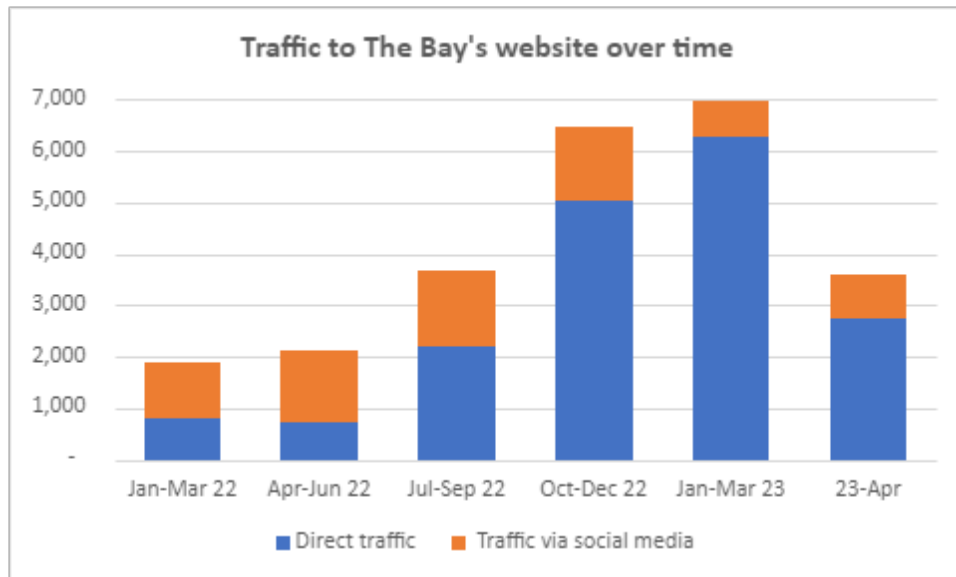
The website features information about the specialised and targeted aspects of the project, including a form to self-refer to the nature and wellbeing sessions, and listings for community engagement events. For the whole population work it presents (as at the end of April 2023) some 'self-service' information for learning about local wildlife and local habitats, and 13 downloadable resources, including how to make a bee hotel, and identification and beach bingo sheets. The site also links to the project's YouTube channel which features 14 videos made by The Bay staff, and provides links to the social media platforms.

Over the 16 months from January 2022 until the end of April 2023 the project's website had 47,839 page views (the sum of the number of times each page on the website was viewed), with a mean per quarter of 8,770 views. Page views per quarter has remained consistent, with the range being from 7,491 to 10,029.

Engagement: We can get some sense of engagement with the website through its bounce rate: this is the proportion of single page visits (instances when people land and then leave without clicking any links or visiting any other pages) divided by the total number of visits. Over time the project's bounce rate has increased, from around 50% in the first two quarters to around 80%. This is not necessarily a bad sign if an increasing proportion of visits are being made by people who already know the website, and are going straight to the information they seek; indeed, the majority of visitors go directly to the events page. But it may suggest a decline in first-time visitors to the site, with only around one in five people visiting more than one page.

We also have access to the average time spent on each page (this metric does not include single page visits, where the lack of an action deprives the software of a ‘finish’ time from which to calculate the duration of the visit.) The mean time was just over two minutes, ranging from nearly three minutes when the site was launched to 80 seconds in July to September 2023.

Route: The following chart shows two routes to the website: direct traffic - whereby people land on the site by searching for it, or by typing in the URL – and visits where a social media user has clicked on a link in Facebook, Instagram or Twitter to reach the site. Note that final period is shown is for April alone, not a quarter.

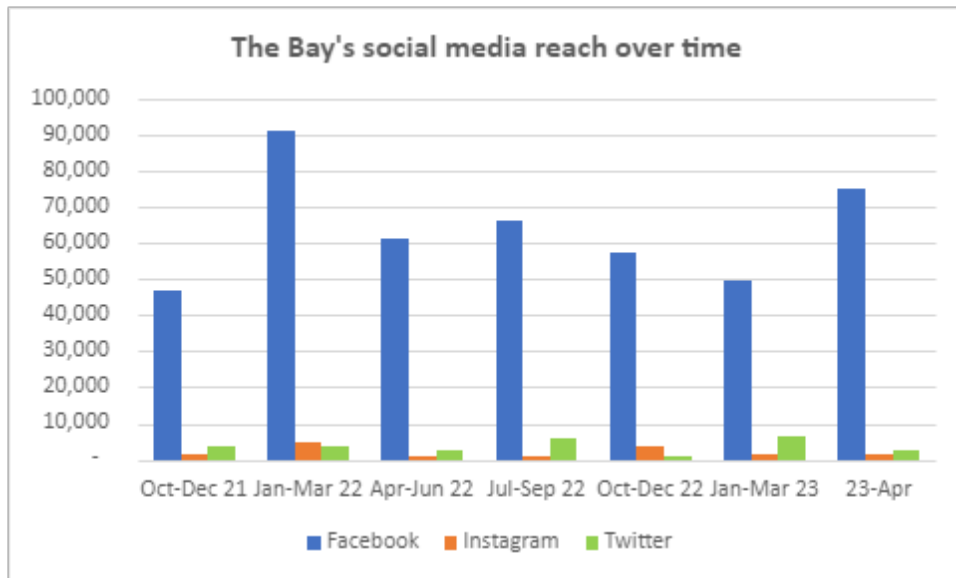


It shows that over time the volume of direct traffic has increased substantially while that from social media been fairly steady, except for dip in January to March 23.

b) Social media

Reach: The following charts compare how the project’s communications via different social media are landing with different numbers of people over time. Note that final period is shown is for April alone, not a quarter. It shows the ‘reach’ for the Bay’s Facebook (@thebayblueprint) and Instagram (@thebaywellbeing) accounts (that is, the number of unique users who have seen a post or page) and ‘impressions’ (the number of times a user is served a Tweet in their timeline or search results) for Twitter (@thebaywellbeing). We note that reach and impressions are not the same: one post seen three times by the same person would be reach of one but three impressions. Furthermore, neither measure indicates if the person engaged with the post, only that it was visible to them.

The chart very clearly depicts how the project’s communications via Facebook are getting to far more people (a mean of 23,574 per month) than those sent out from Instagram and Twitter:

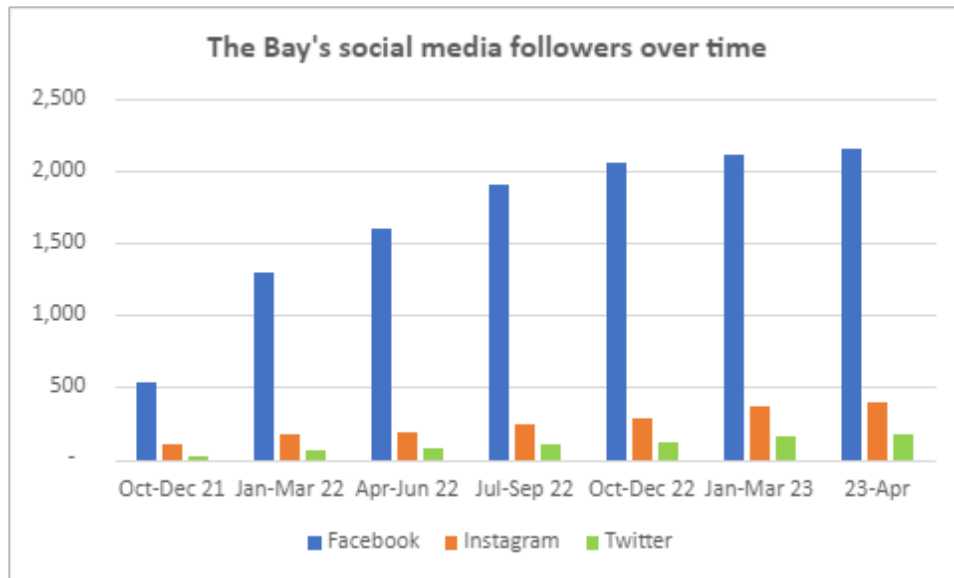


The reach for Facebook in April 2023 is very high, considering that it is the figure for one month, not three. This is because the Wyre hub published two videos about foraging, funded by a small grant from the NHS, and as part of that funding spent £100 on two weeks’ promotion of those videos. The effect of that promotion is evident in the following data for videos viewed from direct postings in Facebook (not via the project’s YouTube channel).

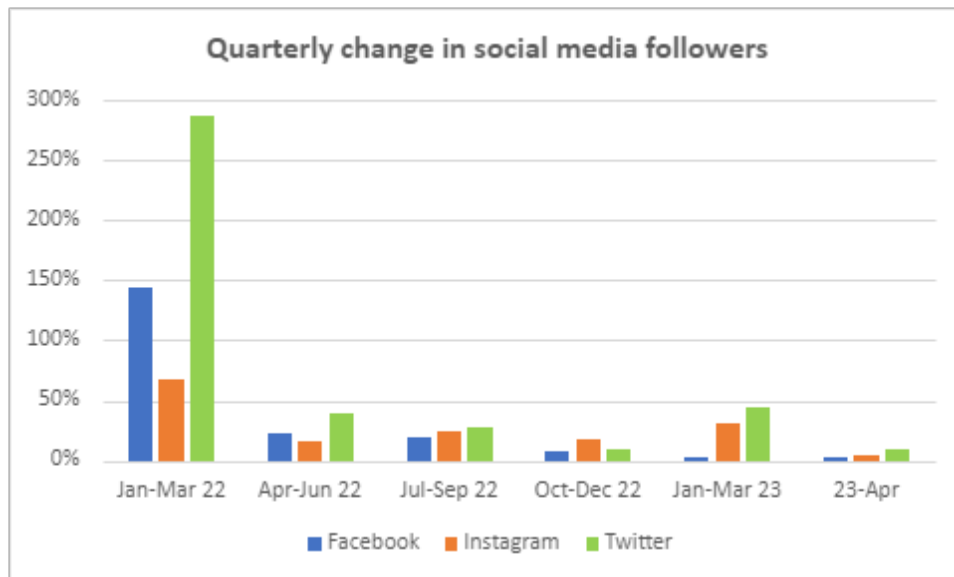
Timeframe	Minutes viewed	No of 1-minute views	No of 3-second views
April to June 22	689	50	2,800
July to Sept 22	4,000	660	11,500
Oct to Dec 22	3,700	347	13,200
Jan to March 23	2,800	173	10,400
April 23	8,800	1,100	29,900

We note that while the bars look insignificant for Instagram and Twitter, they nonetheless represent communication with thousands of people.

Followers: While the number of people seeing posts varies from quarter to quarter, the following chart shows how the number of followers for each platform has increased over time.



Looking at the same data about social media followers, but comparing the proportional change from one quarter to the next, we can see how the growth in Facebook followers has diminished to very small gains (just 2% in the last full quarter) while the growth for Instagram and Twitter has maintained a rate of 10% or above. Though in terms of actual numbers (not percentages) the Facebook gains mainly exceed that for Instagram and Twitter.



Engagement: For Facebook and Instagram we were able to calculate the quarterly engagement rate by dividing the engagement figure (the number of actions, such as adding a reaction or comment, sharing or saving a post, viewing a video or clicking on a link) by the reach¹¹. The project's engagement rate for

¹¹ Note, this is different from the followers' engagement rate, which is calculated by dividing the engagement figure by the number of followers. Note also that we couldn't calculate this for Twitter as it has different metrics.

Facebook is consistent across the quarters at 20%¹². For Instagram we found a much more variable engagement rate, from 3% to 39%, and a mean of 12%.

c) YouTube

The project has made and posted 14 videos on its YouTube channel (@thebayablueprintforrecover3235) since the start of the project. Ten of them are short pieces of one to four minutes, there are also four videos made by community engagement staff and originally presented live as community engagement events: two ‘light lunches’ of around 15 minutes and two hour-long lectures. One of the short films was made in collaboration with students from Salford University, as part of their coursework.

By the end of April 2023 the project’s channel has 23 subscribers, meaning 23 people get The Bay’s videos in their subscription feed.

In addition the Barrow hub’s Community Engagement Officer did a talk for [Morecambe Bay Partnership’s Sunset Series](#), which is posted on their channel; by July 2023 it recorded having had 390 views.

Engagement: The following chart shows each of the 14 videos, ordered from the shortest to the longest. We can see that in total there were 1,424 views via the project’s YouTube channel, and that the mean proportion watched for each video ranged from 6.5% to 61.5%, with a mean for all 14 videos of 40.3%. As might be expected, the proportion watched is lower than average for the longer videos.

	Video length hr:mins:secs	No of views	Mean % viewed	Mean duration of viewing
Luke	0:01:15	49	57.9%	0:00:43
Travelbugs Geocaching Challenge	0:01:29	18	61.5%	0:00:55
Yolanda’s Ways to Wellbeing	0:01:33	43	57.2%	0:00:53
National Marine Week	0:01:48	17	54.2%	0:00:59
Coastal Foraging	0:03:03	95	35.9%	0:01:06
Mental Health Awareness Week 2023 - Hannah	0:03:06	3	38.5%	0:01:12
Mike’s Ways to Wellbeing	0:03:29	82	56.0%	0:01:57
Nature and Wellbeing	0:03:30	283	59.7%	0:02:05
Deborah’s Wellbeing Walk	0:03:30	39	42.0%	0:01:28
Woodland Foraging	0:03:46	168	33.3%	0:01:15
Light Lunches: Blue Spaces and Wellbeing	0:14:39	96	28.2%	0:04:08
Light Lunches: Fleetwood Sand Dunes	0:17:50	85	24.7%	0:04:24
The Incredible Intelligence of Dolphins	0:51:35	94	9.2%	0:04:45
Sharks of Morecambe Bay	1:04:00	352	6.5%	0:04:10
Total and means		1,424	40.3%	0:02:09

d) Traditional media

Project staff have also promoted the project through traditional media, with the following outputs:

¹² This does not include October 2023 onwards, because Facebook has changed the data that it is making available to users.

	Oct-Dec 21	Jan-Mar 22	Apr-Jun 22	Jul-Sep 22	Oct-Dec 22	Jan-Mar 23	April 23	Total
Print media *	13				1	1		15
Radio **		14	12				6	32
TV	1							1
Adverts					1			1

* Ten of the articles in the first quarter were the same interview about The Bay, picked up by sister papers around the North West.

** 24 of the 26 in early 2022 are from a five-minute weekly slot that Barrow's Nature & Wellbeing Officer presented for Cando.fm.

3.3.2 Interview with project staff

We interviewed three staff members to learn about the whole population work: LWT's Nature and Wellbeing Manager, LWT's Communications Officer, and The Bay's Programme Manager.

a) What's worked well

The staff felt that, in the short time available, and given the complexity of the project, they have achieved a lot, particularly considering that the work was mainly delivered through the part-time hours of the Communications Officer who necessarily spent a lot of time supporting marketing and communication around the specialised and targeted aspects of the project. Within LWT their website and social media impact is considered to be good in comparison to other comparable projects.

Over time the project has managed to increase its reciprocal links to like-minded organisations around Morecambe Bay, with different organisations promoting each other's content. They saw this as contributing to a broad community effort of providing people living around Morecambe Bay with information, inspiration and opportunities concerning wellbeing and wildlife, without the need for proprietary or competitive behaviour.

An important achievement is the devolution of social media responsibilities to the hubs. The Communications Officer spoke about how she was initially quite protective about the social media posts, wanting them to be right, and wanting to establish the project's tone. But she realised she needed to train someone in each hub, so that communications could continue while she was on leave. She established guidelines for them to follow and over time trained all the staff, then gradually reduced the oversight as her confidence in people's abilities grew. Importantly, and following some initial resistance, the staff and in particular the trainees are creating posts, to a greater extent than in the Myplace project. They put this down to having built in the expectation from the start, and to some extent insisted on it, but also an element of competition between the hubs, each wanting to get more hits than the other. Another factor is that the trainees, who are mostly younger, are motivated to get experience in workplace use of social media as part of developing their own CVs¹³.

That managed process has allowed responsibility for most of the social media work to be devolved to the hubs. This is good in terms of the flow of information, and also the local flavour and authenticity of

¹³ However, currently funding allocations for beyond September 2023 do not include the Trainee posts.

their posts, allowing staff to post about local activities using their own voices and first-hand experience. Their posts tend to get more engagement than the posts coming from head office. Also positive is that there have been few problems with their posts, and no major issues. When minor issues have arisen – for example, a passive message without local context, or spelling and grammar issues – the Communications Officer just talks to the person who posted and suggests how to do it differently in the future.

b) Main challenges

LWT's Nature and Wellbeing Manager summed up the logistical challenges like this:

I think one of the challenges of this programme was always going to be that, well, two years to set up a programme of this size where you've got referral pathways, different teams, very different geographies, different partners, the complexities of the NHS and your communities...and we're 18 months into that. When I think about the delivery team, out of the 12 posts we only had one person who already worked for the organisation, everybody else was new in post. And for obvious reasons our initial focus was very much about how do we get the practical nature and wellbeing delivery on point and with that active referral pathway, and how do we get the community engagement delivery, on point and present and there with that active participation.

She also noted that when they wrote the project proposal, during a Covid lockdown, they had expected Covid restrictions to be in place and that the online component would initially be more significant. In fact, by the start of the project restrictions were starting to be removed at pace, so the Communication Officer's work became focused on supporting the delivery of the specialised and targeted levels, to the detriment of the whole population work.

The participants also recognised their self-serve materials are very biased towards digital rather than traditional communications modes, and acknowledged the challenge of reaching people who do not use the internet or social media.

The Communications Officer also noted the issue of reaching new people (via any means); assuming that many of the current followers were already interested in nature the project now has the challenge of connecting with others who are less engaged with nature and not in local green networks.

Another challenge is the tension between positive messaging and wanting to promote wellbeing, but also needing to talk about the negative aspects such as damage to the environment and threats to species.

Finally, the project did try to coordinate a calendar of events across all three hubs to tie in with national drivers, such as national seal day, but found it was challenging for the hubs to do, given their different habitat situations and different demands in terms of how far ahead they have to plan for events.

c) Ideas for improvement

The first 19 months of the project has given the team the chance to test different ideas for communications and marketing, and provided some ideas for the future. For example, The Communications Officer found that the 'light lunches' online talks required too much time to be worth continuing, but felt that the relationship formed with Salford University Wildlife Documentary course had been worthwhile and hopes to maintain that.

One idea involves addressing the current gap of motivating and measuring actions for nature as part of the whole population work:

I think kind of next level challenge for us this year is to get better at planning some of those bigger comms events, putting quite a specific call to action in there and knowing in advance how we're going to measure and monitor the response to that. So say, for example, not just encouraging people to get out and active in nature as part of 30 Days Wild but giving them a call to action, something that they can do to take action for nature in Morecambe Bay, and a system for us knowing that that's happened and being able to count it....That might be about sharing their actions as a photo on social media or clicking a link on a website...if they've been lobbying an MP or campaigning for clean waters...There can be any number of different things. But part of what people get from coming along to the Wildlife Trust or Eden and taking action for nature is that feeling of being part of a bigger movement... If we haven't gone that step further to allow people to feel like they're doing that as part of a bigger movement then we've almost lost part of the impact.

Another idea was to link inland residents and their locations to the bay's health, having sessions on and information about the rivers that flow into Morecambe Bay, perhaps doing conservation work, litter picking or campaigning about pollution inland.

3.3.3 Blueprint top tips – whole population level

- ✓ Make social media promotion part of staff job descriptions.
- ✓ Set the tone for the project's online presence and create guidelines for online promotion.
- ✓ Train and expect all staff to generate content for promotion and social media posts.
- ✓ Create or provide accessible and relevant materials for self-service actions for nature.
- ✓ Remember that online materials can be part of the project's legacy, to remain and be useful even if face-to-face delivery ceases.

3.4 Business development

Summary: Being unable to recruit a Business Development Manager was unexpected, and, it seems safe to assume, had a major impact on outcomes for this strand of work. To the project's credit, most of the role's responsibilities were covered by other staff members. For example, they have managed to design and test three business development opportunities to generate income, though it is too early to assess their success. Overall project staff showed great resilience and commitment by taking on some of the work that the postholder would have done. Notably they managed to submit several funding applications to secure the short to medium-term continuation of the project.

One planned element in the project proposal that remains to be addressed is that of identifying five coastal community partners for The Bay to support for learning and replication, though the project is working with one partner in Kent. Arguably that plan was a little premature and will come into play once the learning from the first phase is documented both by this evaluation and in the blueprint materials that will follow. The project has, however, met its intention to remain part of the planning for The Eden Project Morecambe, with weekly communication between the Programme Manager and the Eden Experiences team.

As illustrated in the project's theory of change (see **Section 1.1**), business development is the fourth and final strand of work. To explore this element we held a group interview with LWT's Nature and

Wellbeing Manager, CWT's Director of Development, The Eden Project's Head of Learning Partnerships, and The Bay's Programme Manager.

The project's structure included a full-time Business Development Manager, working in a team within LWT with the part-time Communications and Admin Support Officers. However, after two rounds of recruitment, and despite adjusting the job description after the first round, they did not find anyone suitable for the post.

a) What's worked well

The absence of the Business Development Manager meant that the project has had no dedicated person hours and much less expertise with which to develop the project. But staff in post have willingly taken on some of that work, to try and fill the gaps left by the vacant post. Their acceptance of the situation and readiness to take on additional work is commendable.

The project hired a consultancy company to develop one commercial offer, in the form of [Wild Wellbeing Days](#), whereby groups or individuals can pay to spend a five-days-to-wellbeing day with one of the project's Nature & Wellbeing Officers. The idea is that profits from corporate sessions may support the funding of free sessions. The staff have run practice Wild Wellbeing Days and they are now on The Bay's website, with the offer clearly and attractively presented. The marketing is focusing on targeting HR professionals, including developing sales pathways through LinkedIn.

CWT also took the initiative to develop and trial a second business idea, of [Wildlife Experiences](#), to be marketed to tourists and visitors. Three of the four locations are within The Bay's area, with the fourth nearby. It builds on the Community Engagement element of The Bay, and is delivered by the Barrow hub's Community Engagement Officer and Trainee, enabling those able to self-serve to get a guided introduction to local coastal nature.

A third element is that CWT has trialled bespoke sessions for people living with dementia and their carers called Time in Nature. The work is sponsored by Dignity in Dementia, a charity in Cumbria, but it is not a profitable activity as Dignity in Dementia is not covering the full cost of running the sessions. Instead The Bay is responding to a community need and the level of resource that they have. The Wyre hub used a similar model to run activities about cost of living interventions; the funding did not cover the full costs, but supported The Bay to deliver work that is relevant both to its mission and to community needs.

While noting the difficulty of collaboration especially over several locations, the Programme Manager also spoke of a really positive attitude towards collaborative work among Morecambe Bay's many stakeholders, and felt that more partnership work is developing – again pointing to the need for ambitious projects like The Bay to be funded over a longer timescale, to enable partnership working to develop and become embedded.

b) Main challenges

The participants noted a lot of challenges.

The Business Development Manager post was included in the project design so that someone could focus on those aspects of the project, leaving the other managers to focus on the task of implementation. Instead the project managers have had to take on the additional work and squeeze tasks in as best they can. For example, although CWT and LWT staff are well placed to handle funding

bids, they have not been able to be as strategic about The Bay's funding as a full-time manager could have been. This means that The Bay has been less well served, and no doubt there have also been impacts on other projects for which they have responsibility. This is exacerbated by the short horizons for funding proposals and the need to be able to respond quickly to funders' demands, as explained by LWT's Nature and Wellbeing Manager:

It's part of the challenge of not having a Business Development Manager and the voluntary sector generally, because that means that we have to drop whatever your ideal plans were to chase short term needs. So, ideally, I had a whole set of plans this week to get The Lottery proposal in [for The Bay], but we've had two Greater Manchester bids get through to round two [for another project] that have now got a deadline of 5pm on Tuesday. And we only found out last week! So that redirects my entire week.

With regard to funding they noted that funding horizons are very short-term which makes no sense when systemic change is sought. There is also the problem that community groups can inevitably become competitors when there is a fixed funding pot, which undermines collaboration between them, particularly when the time between a fund being announced and the deadline for submission can be a matter of weeks.

Aside from funding, they spoke of how the voluntary sector is very complex. Collaboration is further undermined by rapid staff turnover in some organisations, and by people generally being overcommitted. Furthermore sometimes national organisations make decisions centrally without attending to the local situation or communicating with local stakeholders. The Programme Manager noted:

We are actually meeting with the RSPB and Natural England this Friday to talk about more collaborative work. Something we've been trying to do for months and months. And it's just that coordinating people, and people being available to yay or nay certain things, and who is the person to advance things within each organisation, that's the issue. And as Rhoda was saying, people move around, change jobs. That's what we've been finding.

CWT's Director of Development also noted the challenge of staff churn, and how it can absorb time and undermine continuity and progress:

We constantly get requests to talk to other organisations about how this is working for us, and then another member of staff comes in and you do it again, and then someone else comes in and you do it again! And that's part of the problem with continuity, isn't it, that staff will come and go, not just in our organisation, everyone's organisation, so how do you build that continuity and understanding of what's happening and who's best placed?

They noted that the corporate work is less popular with their staff, who prefer to remain focused on the core task of supporting those who are isolated and with low wellbeing. Asking them to do corporate work diverts resources from The Bay's specialised and targeted levels of engagement, and risks undermining their job satisfaction. However, the participants also noted that some funders want projects to generate matched funding, and to show steps towards financial sustainability rather than purely relying on grants, so felt they do need to pursue a blended approach which includes some corporate work, while ensuring that free access to The Bay's social wellbeing offers remains at the heart of its delivery. It would be beneficial, if possible, to have less reliance on grant funding and improved financial sustainability and consistency.

c) Ideas for improvement

The group thought that it might be useful to narrow the remit for the Business Development post in order to fill it. If Eden Project were to take on the advocacy level work and the Wildlife Trusts do the fundraising then the job could focus on the aspect of commercial business development. They also thought the post would be more attractive with a longer contract. They noted, however, that charity sector wages are lower than in the corporate sector, so that will always affect recruitment.

In retrospect they felt perhaps, for the short initial period of the project, they might have been better allocating the roles and budget among the partners rather than attempting to recruit. Though they recognised that a manager who is funded to spend half a day a week on The Bay's business development needs to have a spare half a day, and to protect it from encroachment from other demands on them.

In addition to the concerns about diverting resources away from serving isolated people, they were unsure about the potential to generate significant funds from selling their services. An alternative commercial source of funding is to seek corporate sponsorship, in the form of a longer-term relationship with a larger business. The Eden Project has some of these; the company includes the partnership as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility commitment, or its Environmental, Social and Governance response, and provides funding to Eden in exchange for a certain number of days work with their staff per year. LWT and CWT do already have corporate sponsors (11 and 33 respectively) but the annual membership costs are quite low (from £99 to £2,000+VAT per year).

3.5 Cross-cutting research themes

In this final section we share findings on themes that cut across two or more of the levels of intervention.

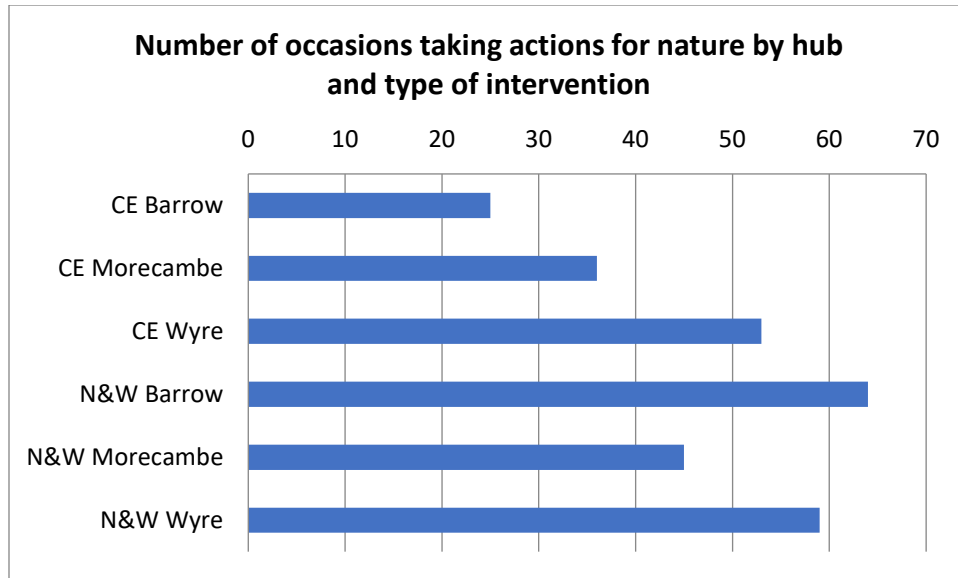
3.5.1 Benefits to nature

Summary: The project has undertaken many actions to benefit nature through its nature and wellbeing events and its community engagement events; it may also have inspired many more. The actions have the dual benefit of a giving people a psychological lift as well as supporting nature; in effect 'actions for nature' are also actions for ourselves and our own wellbeing. They seem to be an important component of The Bay's offer in terms of creating positive emotions, and therefore encouraging people to attend sessions and events. They also create an active connection between people and nature: the majority of interactions are not only learning *about* nature, or mindfulness *in* nature, but also doing something *for* nature.

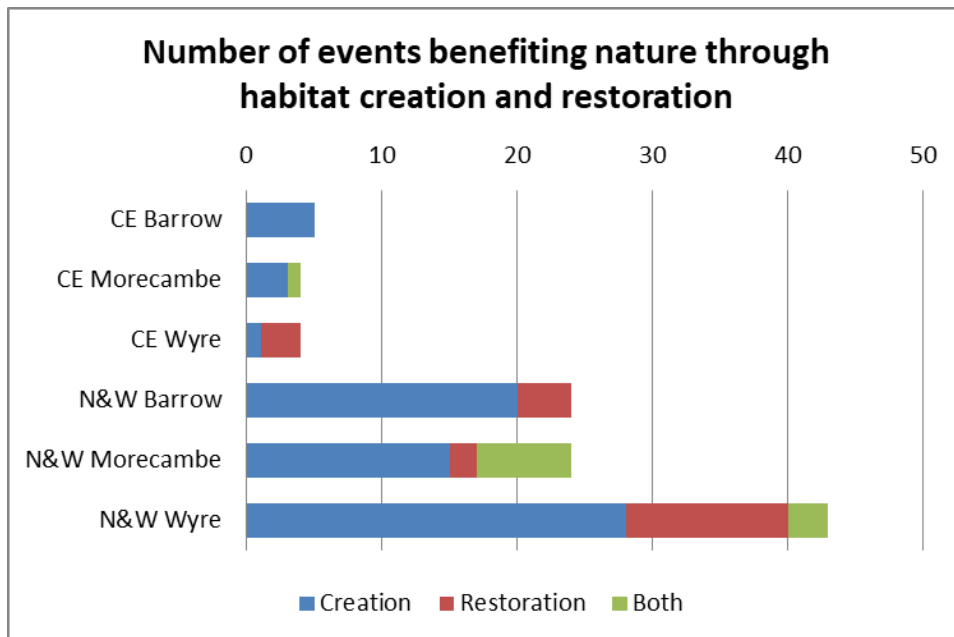
It is positive that the project staff have taken time to record the actions for nature, however, the current system needs improving to make the data more meaningful and consistent.

We noted in **Section 2.1** some limitations with the project's records of its actions for nature. Here we present what we have been able to glean from those records.

Officers made 283 entries in the spreadsheet, with each one being an event that in some way completed, or holds the promise of, an action for nature. The following chart shows the distribution of these by hub and by type of intervention ie whether through a community engagement event or nature and wellbeing session.



The majority of entries are not categorised, but 109 (37%) of them are recorded in the categories of creating or restoring habitats, or both creating and restoring. The following chart shows the spread of those 109 events between the hubs and the specialised (N&W) and targeted (CE) approaches. Some of them are practical activities that have been completed, such as seed plug planting and dead hedging, but others, such as making bird boxes, bird feeders and seed bombs are partial actions: they rely on people using them in order to be of any potential benefit to nature.

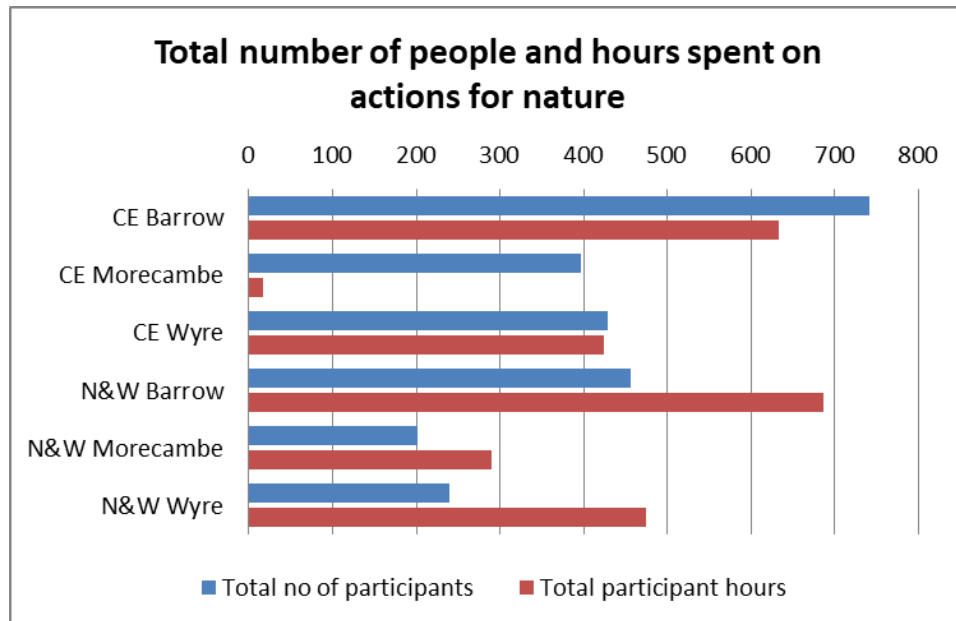


The total number of actions for nature recorded is 1,438, but this, as already discussed, is a figure inflated by the high count recorded for some activities, many of which are less robust and durable in terms of benefits to nature than events scored as being one action. For example, six hours spent fixing deer fencing to protect flora on limestone pavement will have a greater benefit for nature than hanging up one pinecone with fat to feed birds, but both were recorded as one action.

The actions for nature recorded fall into the following categories:

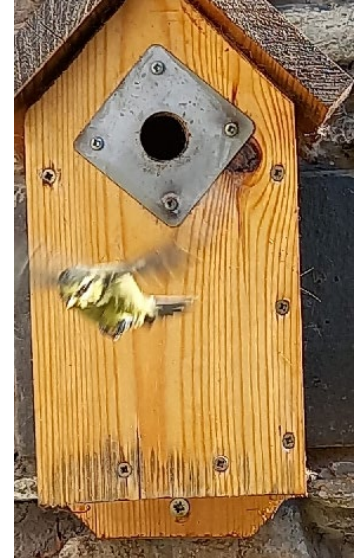
- Getting people to download the iNaturalist app and showing them how to use it
- Conducting various wildlife surveys
- Litter picks and nurdle hunts
- Clearing dune paths and blocking desire line paths
- Collecting seeds, growing plugs and seedlings, sewing and planting
- Removing invasive and unwanted plant species
- Making or handing out hibernacula including bird, bug, bat and hedgehog boxes
- Making or handing out bird feeders
- Other habitat work, including making a mini wildlife pond, creating a reed bed, and fixing a deer fence
- Advocacy in the form of writing to MPs, and writing a letter about proposed building developments

Aside from some missing data for Morecambe, each row of the records also shows how many people (participants plus volunteers) participated and how much time they jointly spent. The total number of people for the whole project was 2,466 (note this does not mean 2,466 individuals, but the sum of the number of people recorded attending each event; so someone attending three events is recorded three times). The number of hours spent on the actions is recorded as 2,528, which is equivalent to 367 days. The following chart shows the breakdown of these figures by hub and by level of engagement. It illustrates that for the community engagement actions the mean time spent per person is an hour or less (the number of people exceeds the number of hours), while for the nature and wellbeing sessions it is higher, ranging from a mean of 1.4 hours per person for Morecambe to 2 hours per person for Wyre.



The project has recently added an [Actions for Nature](#) page on its website, which lists practical things that individuals can do under four categories of actions for pollinators, for birds, litter picking and citizen science. People can also log their actions on the site, which get added to a map. However, at the time of writing only nine actions had been logged. This is new and will need promotion – as people do not yet know about it – but probably also relates to motivation, as individuals might be motivated to act but

not to log their actions. This could also link to how connected they feel to the project and the sense of an online community. We do know though that at least one bird box was installed and used by blue tits, as the person sent this photo to Barrow's Community Engagement Officer!



We asked about the benefits to nature in each of the focus groups. One of the Nature & Wellbeing Officers commented:

1: "I think people like, we call them kind of 'actions for nature', they quite like to do them, like, give back. They feel like, you know, a few weeks in if they feel like they've had the benefit themselves from the natural world, it's quite rewarding for them to then do something to give back. So habitat improvement work, conservation work, or if you look at beach clean, everyone loves a beach clean, just losing themselves on there, just feeling like they're making a big difference.

Uni: So the things that benefit nature potentially are also one of the more popular things for people because of that contribution?

1: Yeah we recently did these kind of postcards where everyone was given a John Muir award and we did all the collective kind of actions for nature of how many bags of litter each one had done, how many surveys they'd done as a unit, and that sense of pride to go away and have that certificate and be like, not only they've felt the benefit themselves but they'd given back and been part of something."

Another officer reflected:

If you do a walk over survey, so that kind of rock pooling on the shore, then that is beneficial to nature because it's going to citizen science. So I've found that kind of, the surveys people really enjoy, because I guess it gives them a chance to feel a bit like a scientist, learning about species that they didn't realise were on the shoreline...and they're actually getting to go and turn over rocks and find them themselves. So it's a really nice mindful activity. But also I've found when people who have been coming for a while, then when we get new people, they have a really big sense of pride of being able to then teach the new people about what species they've learnt or how to do different surveys. Yeah so it's nice them then sharing the skills that they'd already learnt a few weeks ago with the new people because they get so excited and it's like 'did you know this is...'!

A slightly challenging development for the project is the steer provided by Morecambe Bay Local Nature Partnership which will now direct a focus in terms of engaging people to act for nature to education about not disturbing flora and fauna. This will be difficult for The Bay as psychologically people prefer to make a positive action – such as planting something, or removing litter – rather than changing their behaviour by not doing something – such as not walking on the saltmarsh, and not allowing dogs to roam off lead. It will also need a different approach to monitoring. For The Bay it may be part of promoting pro-wildlife behaviour such as the new [Marine and Coastal Wildlife Code](#), and taking action to prevent disturbance, such as The Bay's redirecting its activities away from beaches where Ringed Plover were nesting, and encouraging others to avoid those places.

3.5.2 Blue-green social prescribing

Summary: Project staff appreciated having access to ‘blue’ coastal habitats for their work and many people spoke of being fortunate to live near Morecambe Bay. The desire to ‘open people’s eyes to what’s on their doorstep’ was a recurrent theme, including among the community engagement volunteers.

One of the project’s innovations is to deliver its wellbeing activities around the coast, making them ‘blue-green’ rather than just green social prescriptions. Although the project does also deliver at inland sites much of its focus so far has been on the coast and locations close to the coast. One of its ‘light lunch’ online events outlined the benefits of green and of blue spaces to human wellbeing.

We asked many of the research participants about this. The Nature & Wellbeing Officers had this exchange:

1: “I think certainly with tapping into, trying to get that sense of pride in the kind of coastal communities and really appreciate what’s on their doorstep is, like, really really important. I personally have really enjoyed adapting the sessions to make them coastal.

Uni: Do you get feedback from people, anything particular to do with the coastal, rivers, estuaries...?

2: I think kind of round here people, like, we had a mobile rock pool at our session yesterday and I think people are just amazed that there’s all of that life just there. I think people don’t really realise that and they think that anemones are something super exotic, and they see these things and they’re like ‘wow!’, you know. And I think that’s quite nice, just opening people’s eyes to what is on their doorstep.

3: I think it’s been also really nice things that, well, a lot of people who live for example on Walney, which is an island just off Barrow, literally surrounded by water, who don’t go to the coast. Even though it’s a really thin island. So just even showing them that area and then also showing them things that are on there, for example like the fact that we have shark eggs and they just never would have thought that, and the fascination that comes from that.”

Other people echoed this: that the coast of Morecambe Bay is a fascinating place, and a very different one for humans, with its wide horizons and sense of wildness, and that it’s good to introduce that to people, and to remind others who know but may not often visit or notice it.

The Communications Officer noted the benefit of having blue *and* green contexts in which to run the sessions:

There’s a lot of different ecosystems available on the coast and there’s a lot of different nature to enjoy. So, yeah, there is a variety and that’s really helpful for messaging, being able to say ‘there’s a lot here, there’s a lot of nature on your doorstep, just need to step outside your front door’. But if we sort of pigeonholed ourselves to just doing the blue stuff ...a lot of the time the tides are in and you can’t actually go out onto the beach! So you kind of need to have the variety otherwise you’re sort of stuck, not being able to go out for like 12 hours of the day. So yeah I think it’s good to have the variety and it’s good to show people that the coastline actually is more than just beach and it’s more than just cliffs...there is still ancient woodland and there is limestone pavement and dunes and this and that and the other as well.

One nature and wellbeing participant referred to blue-green benefits in their self-penned case study:

Following my diagnosis of Complex PTSD with Dissociation, I noticed that I am most relaxed and at ease when in certain landscapes, especially hills, and have always noted that I am relaxed and calm around water of any kind, and started building this regularly into my week but mindful of my limitations with my physical health with ME/CFS. Being outdoors with like-minded people in our hub has had an enormous positive impact on all aspects of my being.

One staff member pointed out the balancing act of telling people about Morecambe Bay but not encouraging them to go out into the bay, due to risks posed by quicksand and the need to avoid disturbance to nesting and feeding birds. They also noted that the beauty sits alongside industry, such as Heysham nuclear power plant, and the BAE complex at Barrow: “you’ve got that juxtaposition of lovely nature, then industrial! So it can be quite interesting trying to say ‘look it’s lovely, just don’t look that way!’.”

3.5.3 A multi-faceted approach

Summary: Among project stakeholders there was support for all three ‘multi’ parts of the project’s structure and strategy. Furthermore, all three elements appear to be strengths. As a multi-agency initiative it benefits from the four partners’ different skills and experience, from better funding opportunities, and improved delivery through working with relevant local partners. As a multi-site project it is delivering work which combats isolation and ill health right around Morecambe Bay, to a footprint that fits with the local NHS trust’s area. And as a multi-level project it is providing more holistic support to a greater range of people, and with more benefits to people and nature, than projects which focus only on specialised work with small groups.

The project is unusual for being multi-agency, multi-site and multi-level. We explored each of these with research participants.

3.5.3.1 Multi-agency

Four core partners

The Bay is multi-agency partnership between LWT, CWT, The Eden Project and LSCFT. In many of the interviews we asked about participants to reflect on this. One project officer from The Bay said:

Something I’m really proud of, and our kind of unique selling point, is that partnership with the NHS, the Lancashire and South Cumbria Foundation Trust, because rather than just us being Eden or the Wildlife Trust saying this is good, having that backup is really important and really cool... it seems quite popular now, the whole nature and wellbeing thing, people are jumping on the bandwagon, and I consider ourselves kind of pioneers in this, we should be proud of what we do. But yeah a lot of people are doing it now, just book on through Eventbrite, so there’s no paperwork to do, there’s no jumping through hoops, but the whole reason we have that is to keep everybody safe and have those records there and be as safe as we can operating with the people we’re working with... I do think it’s got that stamp of authenticity, you know that we’re all mental health first aid trained, we’re not just like some random people saying ‘come out and hug a tree in nature, it’s good for you’. It’s having that association I think is really really important.

Others echoed the point that the partners all bring credibility, from both the side of nature and of health and wellbeing, and they bring different skills and experience. There is further potential to be tapped here: in the future they hope to improve referral pathways from the NHS Trust to the project, and to feed into The Eden Project’s national level advocacy around green social prescriptions and the need to mainstream investment in them.

They also noted that, from a practical point of view, many funders prefer a partnership approach, and that different partners have access to and have secured different sources of funding. One respondent felt that having one block of funding from the People's Postcode Lottery has enabled the partners to work together and deliver at a greater scale than three small and separate projects would have managed.

Although the project area incorporates the northern and southern margins of the two wildlife trusts, it is a good fit with the NHS' Lancashire and South Cumbria Trust (the latter having a larger inland footprint). While Eden Project Morecambe will be located in Morecambe and have most impact there it aims to embrace the whole bay and thus also fits with The Bay's project area.

The only negative mentioned was in terms of people's availability, and getting people from each of the partners (and other stakeholders) to make progress. One steering group member commented *"What happens in the meetings is OK, it's what happens in between...the work that needs to be going on in between to get round the partners and let them know about this fantastic project."*

Local partners

The Bay is also multi-agency in the sense of engaging with multiple partners relating to both referral and delivery of activities. We held two focus groups with local partners (environmental organisations and community groups) and also gave them the opportunity to provide feedback through an online form. In total six people attended the focus groups and three gave written feedback.

a) What's gone well

Local partners were very positive about the project, and outlined the following advantages of working with The Bay:

- It gave a conservation organisation easy access to its nature & wellbeing groups, when they had failed to get referrals themselves but had funding to do wellbeing work.
- It is giving a student support group easy access to field trips through well-being activities and hands-on habitat restoration workdays: *"really accessible and engaging and well organised well-structured days"*.
- Giving college students a variety of different work experience and on a regular basis through conservation careers days: *"They're very accommodating and, yeah, they've been very, very helpful ... they keep in contact with us. And if we've got any ideas of things that we think they could support us with, it's a two-way street, they're happy for me to reach out. So it's a really good, useful partnership."*
- Giving children with a range of disabilities easy access to enjoyable holiday sessions.
- Giving asylum seekers access to nature and wellbeing activities: *"Alex is extremely well organised and always has a variety of activities to propose. He also offers hot drinks and down time during his sessions and our service users could not be happier to attend... One of the strongest strengths is the soft approach where participants are gently encouraged to participate but not obliged to do anything they don't want."*
- For a community health promotion organisation, taking time to respond to local needs: *"We have seen some projects come in with a fixed agenda and fixed timescale - the two do not allow for the changing needs of a community and the opportunity to build up trust. The Bay have placed good staff in roles and given them the time to become an important partner in the local network."*
- Giving a library an easy way to offer something different to residents.

- Staff are reliable, amenable and flexible, and well suited to their roles.
- Good communication from the staff, and good promotion of events.
- For those organisations bringing people to sessions, appreciation that The Bay's services are free, as they could not afford to pay for them.
- Environmental groups finding it easy to join The Bay on an activity and to work together.
- The staff have experience and locations that they know well, but are also willing to ask for help with expertise that they lack.
- Appreciation of the ongoing partnership: *"The Wyre Team have been great - Mike, Jane and the team work hard in the community. The Bay IS a key partner and we look forward to continuing to work with them."*

We asked people giving online feedback if their expectations had been met; one said they had been 'fully met', the two said they had been 'exceeded'. When asked about how The Bay compares to their experience of similar organisations one rated it as 'above average' and two said it was 'one of the best'

b) Main challenges

The environmental partners noted how there is no single 'shop front' for up-to-date information about what the many groups are doing around The Bay, and this causes missed opportunities. For example, one participant said it would have been nice to have taken her group members not only to the coast but also to some woodland, while another had had seedlings to plant in woodland but had struggled to find the volunteers. The chance of being in the same focus group brought their compatible needs together and suggests an unmet need for further partnership working.

They noted that [Lancaster and District Volunteering Service](#) does have a website listing voluntary opportunities, but that only covers Lancaster and Morecambe, and is aimed at individuals seeking things to get involved in. The [Morecambe Bay Local Nature Partnership](#) is a team of organisations working together to make more space for nature. Their website outlines key projects that they're involved in, but it's not a comprehensive overview of what all organisations are doing because their focus is on habitat scale change through large strategic projects.

c) Ideas for improvement

There were few ideas for improvement as people were very satisfied with the project as it is, other than hoping to continue and strengthen their partnerships.

One person wondered if The Bay could get funding to take on the role of facilitating networking among the many environmental groups around Morecambe Bay. A related suggestion was some form of online map or directory where it is each group's responsibility to keep their entries up to date.

One person wasn't sure how much The Bay is known in the wider community, and wanted the project to 'blow its own trumpet' a little more about its achievements.

One said it would be great if The Bay could run health and wellbeing sessions in Lancaster as well as in Morecambe.

Another hoped to increase their organisation's collaborative working with The Bay in the future, such as increasing community engagement around water quality surveys.

3.5.3.2 Multi-site

All stakeholders felt that the project needs its three hubs in order to serve the different parts of Morecambe Bay, recognising that local geography means long travel times between places which are relatively close as the crow flies. (Travelling from Walney Island to Cleveleys – which are about 25kms apart - takes around four hours by public transport, or 105 minutes by car, a journey of around 120kms).

At the referrer's focus group people requested more hubs, to provide more local delivery because willingness and ability to travel can be very limited among people with mental health challenges. One of the NHS managers wondered if, with more staffing, a 'hub and spoke' model could work, where a staff member based in a hub runs a single weekly session in another location. In fact this is already happening, for example, the Barrow Health & Wellbeing Officer runs a weekly group in Grange-over-Sands, while the Morecambe Officer has a weekly event in Lancaster. However, as each officer can only realistically run three or four groups a week their ability to branch out to other locations is limited.

The context of each of three hubs is different, in terms of recent history, and the sociodemographic profile of the local population, as outlined in **Section 1.2**. The ecological context and range of habitats is also different. On top of this the number and range of local partners varies, as does the relationship with local government. For example, Wyre's Community Engagement Officer has higher demands for advance information and approvals than the officer in Barrow.

Regarding communications, some staff initially wanted to have their own social media, for their hub. Instead the project has stuck with having a single account on each platform for the whole project. This is partly pragmatic – it is more efficient to monitor and manage one site than three – but also links the staff in the different hubs and the communities around Morecambe Bay by sharing content from each hub with everyone. Usefully, though, the website allows people to search for events by hub or by using the map view.

We did not ask about having a physical hub as part of the research, but the topic came up in two interviews. The Programme Manager, who has been operating from the Morecambe hub (a previously empty shop in the Arndale Centre) since February 2023 felt that it has helped give the project real world, not just online, visibility. They advertise events in the shop window, people drop in to talk, and to collect free food (as they have partnered with FareShare), and a few people have signed up to wellbeing and nature sessions. They also use the shop for some project activities, such as crafts and laughter yoga. Having an indoors venue also creates opportunities for collaborating with other organisations, such as a local community music charity hosting kite making workshops there in advance of the Morecambe kite festival. However, the Community Engagement Officers in Wyre and Barrow did not think a physical hub would help with their work, as there was nowhere suitable within reach of locations they use, and because staffing it would be a distraction to planning events and getting outside. One officer noted the different likely value of different types of interaction: *"...coming out on a nature walk is worth three people popping into the hub and having a biscuit and taking a leaflet, at least."* We note that the Morecambe hub's context is different, in terms of having two additional and project-wide staff members who are based there, and having a large population plus tourists, the shop and a beach (albeit a mechanically cleaned one) all within walking distance of each other.

3.5.3.3 Multi-level

The strategy of using nature and wellbeing groups to support people who are isolated or with low mental health had been tried and tested by LWT through their Myplace project. The innovation with

The Bay was to add on the further two levels of engagement – targeted community engagement and self-serve information for the whole population – as well as the business development aspect.

The research participants were positive about this multi-level strategy. People sometimes connect to the project through one level, and then engage through another. For example, attending a community engagement event and then signing up for, or encouraging a relative to sign up for, nature and wellbeing sessions. The Nature & Wellbeing Officers also like the idea of having events that their group participants can attend once they have stopped coming to their sessions. However, in practice the jump between the intimate sessions and the public events may be too big for many people. As noted in **Section 3.1.6**, they felt some kind of intermediate step might help.

The project managers noted how having two levels of delivery brings different personalities into the project, compared to Myplace. They felt that the community engagement work suits more extrovert people, and this may have also contributed to The Bay staff’s better rate of generating social media posts.

4. Discussion and suggestions

4.1 Green social prescribing

4.1.1 Contextual challenges

The project’s position regarding green social prescribing (GSP) was summed up by the Eden Project’s Head of Learning Partnerships:

The strategic case that needs to be made is that this is not a luxury, this is a fundamental part of the health service and is value for money and should be funded per se as part of a primary health service.... it’s all part of that public health continuum of keeping people well, providing ways to promote public health before intervention is needed, but also then seeing these as interventions that are totally valid, and value for money, as opposed to GP visits and medication.

While The Eden Project and others are actively advocating for this shift, it is a long way off; The Bay cannot expect to be fully commissioned by the NHS to deliver services to the public any time soon.

A recent UK government assessment of capacity to deliver GSP (DHSC, 2023b) found that system-wide changes are needed in each of four areas. The following table sets out those areas and relates them to The Bay:

Areas identified as needing system-wide changes	Relevance to The Bay
1) Funding, with a need to move away from short-term competitive funding that drives inefficiencies and uncertainty in provision, and which incentivises new and different green and nature-based activities at the expense of continuity.	While its initial block of funding from the People’s Postcode Lottery has enabled The Bay to achieve a lot at scale and in a short time, it needs longer-term funding to provide continuity and to realise the potential of the relationships and partnerships that its staff have built. Chasing and managing small pots of funding from multiple funders is inefficient and creates additional stress and insecurity for delivery staff, participants, and volunteers. Furthermore, at the time of writing, when the Trainees’ one year contracts end in

	September, there is no funding to replace them, which will have impacts on project delivery, as well as creating a gap in progression opportunities for current volunteers and participants.
2) Knowledge and information, with a need to generate awareness of the benefits of green and nature-based activities among GPs, link workers and service users.	It is an on-going task for The Bay to promote its nature and wellbeing offer to referrers and potential participants, a task that distracts from the core business of running the sessions and supporting each individual.
3) Consistency and contextuality, with a need to develop consistent language, metrics and accreditation in an overarching framework that also encourages local variety of green and nature-based activities in ways that meet the needs of communities.	The Bay can continue to improve the consistency of some of its own metrics (see Section 4.2), but this theme requires nationally coordinated collaboration between multiple stakeholders in the health, community and environment sectors to achieve. The Bay’s blueprint may prove useful, however, in terms of setting standards (for example, training staff in mental health first aid, assessing potential participants ¹⁴ , and supporting them through their journey) compared to the less rigorous approach that some organisations take.
4) Networks, with a need to strengthen cross-sectoral partnerships and collaboration to facilitate resource and knowledge sharing between the health and third sector.	As noted by research participants, the local context of environmental and community groups, and of GSP-relevant services, is complex and lacks a single effective searchable platform. This creates a lot of inefficiency, with actors in all agencies attempting yet unable to keep abreast of what’s happening, and hence missed opportunities for collaboration and referrals.

We note that also the challenge of the complexity of ‘the’ NHS, a single label which contains a multitude of different bodies. It may be useful for people setting up nature based social prescribing interventions to relate the level of their intervention to the level of the NHS that they most align with. Referrals into general nature-based activities might sit comfortably with primary care, while more specialised work with people experiencing mental health challenges might align better with secondary care. The strength and challenge with The Bay’s approach is that it is working to engage as a programme across both those levels, plus the at the public health level with its whole population work.

14 We’re pleased to note that The Bay has not experienced the issue found in the government’s review, which found that *“There is a worrying pattern of link workers and green activity providers receiving patients with complex health conditions that they are not equipped to work with. Often these patients have moderate to severe mental health needs. In effect, these could be considered to be inappropriate referrals”* (DHSC, 2023b, unpaginated). Of 403 referrals to The Bay only one was declined by the project as being unsuitable.

4.1.2 Increasing the number of referrals

The Bay generally does not have waiting lists for its nature and wellbeing sessions, and currently has the capacity to work with and help more people. Staff have put a lot of effort into trying to increase the number of referrals the project receives, which seems to have been paying off in recent months with an upward trend in referrals throughout year two. This fits with LWT's experience in other locations, that it takes time to make the connections and to establish the referral pathways.

Referrals from the NHS:

Recent nationwide research into social prescribing with 501 clinicians found that 80% agreed with the idea that nature-based activities offer unique benefits to patients (DHSC, 2023a).

They felt that feedback on patient outcomes following referral to a nature-based activity would help, as they tend to only hear from patients where a referral has not been successful and the patient has returned to see them. As one GP said *"The biggest thing for me would be to know if it's making any difference - it's feedback. It doesn't have to be a lot... the value of that is that you can say to people who come in subsequently, I've referred people to this and they have found it really helpful."*

Data from this survey suggests that some NHS employees may be more receptive than others:

- 65% said they feel very favourably towards green social prescribing, with females recording a higher rate than males, and those who spend time outdoors daily or most days recording a higher rate than those who spend time outdoors less than weekly (75% and 42% respectively).
- 80% of clinicians had referred at least one person to social prescribing, and 70% of them do so at a rate of at least once per month. As The Bay's staff are aware, some people embrace social prescribing and refer frequently; in the national survey 29% of respondents were referring once per week or more, with those referring at least weekly making a mean average of six referrals per week.

Although The Bay seeks to inform all NHS staff who might refer patients about its offer, tactically it could focus its efforts on clinicians who have already referred, those who seem most interested, and those who themselves opt to spend time outdoors. It could also systematise giving feedback to referrers; from conversation in our focus group with referrers it seems this does not always occur. The Bay might also focus on asking those who are enthusiastic about the project to share information about The Bay with their colleagues. Word of mouth is an important form of recruitment for The Bay's project participants, and is likely to be important among social prescribers too.

A strategy which The Bay is aiming to follow is to work with Integrated Care Board representatives to understand and make the most of the changes which are happening as the NHS moves towards a place-based approach. Having begun by working with a secondary mental health provider it has taken time for the project to establish relationships with primary health care providers; it now needs to build on its engagement with PCNs (Primary Care Networks) and the new Integrated Care Community (ICC) Community Development Leads.

The Bay will also learn from LWT's trial in Greater Manchester as part of one of the [seven national GSP test-and-learn sites](#), where it is the link between the NHS and the green sector, and has two-way referrals from and to social prescribers.

Non-NHS referrals:

The Bay is keen to work with teams within LSCFT to support referrals. However, it might be more effective to seek more referrals from local organisations, and through people booking themselves in to sessions. Even accounting for those self-referrers who heard about the project from a health worker, which brings NHS-related referrals to 26%, non-NHS referrals account for the majority (74%) of the total.

Self-referrals:

Of the 187 people recorded as self-referrals, 99 of them - which is 26% of the total – said they came via three sources: the media including social media, word of mouth, and one of the project’s hubs, events or LWT. These are relatively low-cost modes of promotion for the project which could, perhaps, be further exploited. For example, by getting social media posts into wider community forums, or to more online groups about nature or mental health. It is possible that current and former participants might also be encouraged to share information about the project with people they know.

Another tactic would be to ask people who have self-referred and benefited from the project to feed their experience back to the place where they heard about The Bay, or to give their Nature and Wellbeing Officer their contact’s details and permission to share feedback. As the GP cited above noted, people are more likely to refer again if they have some sense it was worthwhile. Furthermore, doing so may link the participant back to support systems. In the focus group one NHS referrer said she could take responsibility for helping someone find their next steps when they stop attending The Bay’s sessions, thereby relieving the Nature & Wellbeing Officer of that task.

Community organisations:

While the project’s core approach is to take referrals for individuals who then join a group for around 12 sessions, each hub has also delivered shorter blocks, either for clients of partner organisations, or on a certain theme or using a different location. For example, the Wyre hub ran short blocks on gardening at Fleetwood library, and on foraging and outdoor cooking in response to the cost of living crisis. It has also had a series of photography workshop sessions with young people, and worked with Fleetwood Primary Care Network support group to deliver sessions to older people with mobility limitations. Recruitment for these sessions used usual referral pathways and self-referrals, but gave more options to fit with people’s interests and abilities. These shorter blocks fit with The Bay’s mandate and have enabled the project to reach out to and engage with specific groups. For the purposes of evaluation, however, it would have been useful to have been able to analyse data from those short blocks separately from the usual nature and wellbeing groups.

4.1.3 Increasing attendance and retention

In addition to attracting more referrals, The Bay could try to improve the proportion of referred people who start attending sessions, and the proportion of people who exit the project in a positive way, rather than dropping-out. Unfortunately we currently lack detailed data to link each referred person’s journey with the referral pathway that led them to the project, so we don’t know if there are pertinent trends between the different pathways and the likelihood of attendance or a positive exit. More detailed monitoring of each individual’s journey, including reasons for exiting, would enable more effective reporting. The officers are well placed to develop ideas about how to do increase attendance and retention, while keeping their focus on each individual’s wellbeing. We note though that there could be

a conflict of interests if a push to meet attendance and retention targets led to staff putting pressure on individuals, or incentivised them to seek 'easy' clients and to reject those that they feel may not attend. A first step would be to review the analysis in this report and then hold a workshop at which staff could discuss ideas and commit to testing a few do-able strategies.

One possible change that managers have identified during the evaluation is for the project to consider how it relates to and presents the 'budget' of 12 sessions. While funders often want numerical certainty, and managers have to use figures to budget and set targets, it may be that the 12 sessions limit could be revised, particularly in terms of how it is communicated to participants. In their focus group referrers mentioned how some of their patients are put off by the 12 week limit, because they are hoping for something long-term; it's clear that The Bay would not be able to cater to that. But by softening the framing of 12 weeks it could, perhaps, make participation seem less intimidating for those who feel a 12-week commitment is a long time, and more accommodating for those who dislike the idea of a cut off. And as some people need more than 12 sessions and others need fewer it might be beneficial to have it as a management benchmark, allowing the participants in dialogue with the officers to use the number of sessions they actually need. We note that in scaling-up programmes, including those for mental health, there is a tendency towards fairly rigid and replicable rules and models. One potential advantage of nature-based social prescribing is its ability to adapt to the evolving wider needs of individuals, and being flexible (within limits) about the number of sessions may be an important part of a person-centred approach. The Bay is already taking a more flexible approach than its 12-session framing describes; it would be a positive development if it can improve its monitoring so that all parties can learn from this.

4.1.4 Blueprint top tips – establishing reliable referral pathways

- ✓ Invest time at the outset to mapping possible organisations and understanding the local NHS set up and prescription networks.
- ✓ Promote your offer to them eg through taster sessions, short testimonials, going to health and wellbeing fairs.
- ✓ Keep promotional materials short and visually attractive.
- ✓ Project officers ideally build relationships with prescribers, remembering to track and follow-up on communications.
- ✓ Once a prescriber's client becomes a participant, keep in touch with the prescriber, including towards the end of the person's journey.
- ✓ Renew promotional efforts regularly, as staff changes can be quite rapid, and prescribers may forget about the project. Keep reminding them that your project is active, and give them confidence in it as a potential activity for their clients.

4.2 Monitoring and evaluation

Our interactions with officers around the data they gather, and the act of analysing data supplied by the project, lead us to several suggestions about future monitoring and evaluation.

An easy improvement would be to **establish standardised spreadsheets** for all types of data that staff have to record, so that data from each hub is always comparable. Currently, for example, data about volunteers is recorded in different ways by different organisations within the partnership, as are community engagement activities.

It would also be beneficial to **build analytical outputs into the sheets**, such as functions which display relevant totals and averages. Currently it seems that people input their data – or send it to the project administrator to input - because it is part of their job to do that, but they don't get immediate insights from the data as it aggregates. Whereas ideally monitoring data gives all project actors useful on-going feedback to assist with continuous improvement.

The project can also **make use of Tables and PivotTables** in excel spreadsheets to provide better analysis efficiently. For example, to easily compare data between the hubs.

Consider using **drop-down categories** to enter multiple choice answers, so that project staff are forced to input the data consistently. This would avoid the problem of different words or spellings being entered for the same categories, meaning we had to clean up the data and make it consistent before we could analyse it.

Create guidance for quantifying the actions for nature. As set out in **Sections 2.1.6 and 3.5.1** the data is currently inconsistent. It's not easy to think of a perfect system, as there is judgement involved in how we value different actions. But the project could, for example, value handing out 20 birdboxes as one action rather than 20 actions, to prevent the skewing and action-inflation that has happened. Or having different layers of actions from mass participation small actions, to time intensive larger individual actions. It could also be useful to introduce some categories, for example, to distinguish between 'finished' actions (eg clearing a bag of litter) and 'partial' ones that require further action before they can be of any benefit to nature (eg installing a bird box). However, as with any monitoring system it is important that it is no more complicated than it needs to be.

Support staff and volunteers to ask participants to **fill in the nature and wellbeing questionnaire more systematically**, as close to the intended time intervals as possible.

Review and improve the nature and wellbeing questionnaire to give respondents more options; specifically, for questions 7 and 9 use Likert scales instead of yes/no. For example, the answer options for 9 *As a result of taking part with sessions have you been more active?* could, instead of 'yes' and 'no', be 'yes, very much more', 'yes, much more', 'yes, a bit more' and 'no'. This will result in slightly more revealing data about the extent to which their participation has changed their level of activity.

Create better systems for reporting data from thankQ and sharing it regularly with team members, and build on efforts to ensure that the Nature and Wellbeing Officers are updating records regularly for all stages of a participants journey. ThankQ contains a lot of information for each person, but it is currently difficult to access and aggregate that information. This work may also require the creation of some new fields, for example, whether the person had, or planned to come with, someone to support them on their first face-to-face contact with The Bay, and the addition of multiple exit categories, to get a better overview of why people stop attending sessions. Over time the project may learn what measures / pathways increase the likelihood of people starting and continuing to attend, and whether there are any sociodemographic correlations.

Consider investigating why people do not start attending or exit the project when Nature & Wellbeing Officers do not already know the reasons. For example, the Project Administrator could call or send a short (online or paper) form to try to get feedback from former participants as to why they stopped coming, and if there was anything the project could have done differently. We note, however, that

people may not be willing to share their reasons; in a national survey about green social prescribing 47% of people who were asked *Why did you not participate in the activity you were referred to?* opted for the answer *'I'd prefer not to say'*.

The project may want to consider **trailing the option of filling in an online feedback form after community engagement events** by displaying the QR code for that event's form, and handing out paper printouts of the QR code.

Consider setting a framework for seeking feedback at community engagement events instead of an ad hoc approach. For example, target two large-scale events per year per hub and four smaller scale events, or, by the event type, get feedback from at least one of each type of event per hub each year. It's not necessary for the officers to gather feedback at every event, but it may be useful to have some structure around when they seek it.

4.2.1 Blueprint top tips – monitoring and evaluation

- ✓ Involve all staff in monitoring and evaluation, and feed analysis back to them.
- ✓ Use standardised shared files, so that data inputted by different people is in the same format, and automatically compiled into whole project data.
- ✓ Convert spreadsheets into tables so data can easily be separated, for example, by hub. Use PivotTables for more advanced analysis.
- ✓ Add drop down lists to spreadsheets to reduce errors in data entry for multiple choice questions, and so that data can be interpreted as the project progresses.

For future evaluations, we note that Lancaster University was advised that it needed NHS ethics approval (on top of the university's own ethics processes) in order to involve NHS employees in the research. However, near the end of the long process of seeking this approval we were advised that it was not necessary. We note this here in the hope of saving others similar frustrations and recommend triple-confirming advice with NHS partners, local NHS R&D office, and the Health Research Authority.

4.3 Management

The research methodology and the short time frame did not allow us to observe how the project is managed. We are not, therefore, able to comment on how the project's management performed or make suggestions for improvement. Instead here we share a few management-related top tips to emerge from the research.

4.3.1 Blueprint top tips – managing the programme

- ✓ If funding permits, provide services at the different levels, to serve the whole community from specialised and focused work to public engagement events and self-serve offers.
- ✓ Give staff freedom and flexibility around the content and location of their sessions, with the foundation of the five ways to well-being and meeting the project's aims and objectives.
- ✓ Consider giving each officer their own budget, or greater clarity about proactive budget spend.
- ✓ Support working relationships between the different levels; it is easy for them to operate very separately, as they have their own ways of working and targets.
- ✓ Train all staff to be active in promotion through social media.
- ✓ Expect some partnerships to be less fruitful than others, and be ready to move on and try something else.

4.4 Volunteers

Part of The Bay's five-year vision in the funding proposal was to have *a resilient volunteer network and people with 'lived experience' involved in the long-term running of the programme*. After just 19 months each hub has former participants of the nature and wellbeing sessions now working each week as peer support volunteers in those sessions, and local groups of volunteers who help run community events on an ad hoc basis.

The community engagement volunteers who attended our focus group (which, we note, did not include any people from the Wyre hub) were positive about the project and its staff, but wanted to be kept more informed about the wider project, and to have the opportunity to be more involved. (We note that other volunteers who were not at the focus group might feel differently; for example, some might prefer simply to sign up for an event, turn up to help, and then go home without further responsibility, or need for any more training or affirmation.) Partly in response to this The Bay has recently established quarterly skills and development days, and held the first one in June 2023, where volunteers and staff meet for training and to discuss the project's direction.

It is to The Bay's credit that there is enthusiasm at the grassroots about the project, and people willing to commit to voluntary roles for both the specialised and targeted levels of work. The exchange is beneficial to both parties; the individuals get training and personal development opportunities and The Bay benefits from their work to support delivery and in some cases expertise. For the Nature and Wellbeing groups it is particularly useful to have people with lived experience providing peer support to new participants. Becoming a volunteer is also an excellent way to support former participants' wellbeing, on-going development, and future employment prospects; in 2022/23 about 6% of LWT's workforce had previously been Myplace participants. In Morecambe three participants from the nature and wellbeing sessions started volunteering in those sessions, and are now also volunteering to support the community engagement work.

One suggestion made at the focus group of community engagement volunteers was to increase the project's reach by having volunteers who lead sessions. LWT does have a role description and training protocols for Lead Volunteers, who can lead practical activities which would otherwise be unsupervised or cancelled due to limited staff resources. While there is precedent with LWT for having sessions run by volunteers rather than paid staff, there are advantages and disadvantages to that approach, which is the subject of internal debate and which will be discussed at future skills and development days. The Bay's managers are keen to avoid being possessive about their volunteers, instead wanting to support volunteer action for nature and the community across The Bay area, feeling that increasing capacity for Morecambe Bay as a whole is a worthwhile project outcome, rather than focussing only on increasing capacity for The Bay as a project. This would, for example, include supporting volunteers to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to progress to volunteering at naturalist groups, or within grassroots green groups or education, or by completing their own species monitoring or forming self-led iNaturalist groups. It will be important to clearly identify these pathways, and to find ways of recording this activity where appropriate.

The role of volunteers to date and in the next phase of the project will be one of the themes for reflection and planning at the end of The Bay's first two years. The project staff have successfully garnered the support and enthusiasm of volunteers who are already an asset to the project, it will be a priority to see how they can build on that good will and energy in the future.

5. Conclusion

The Bay is an ambitious multi-agency, multi-site and multi-level project with a focus on helping people through connecting them to nature while also delivering ecological benefits. It has achieved a lot in just 19 months. It recruited its staff and started delivery quickly, and, with the support of local volunteers, has engaged 9,380 people - twice as many as planned - through its targeted community engagement events around Morecambe Bay, including 60% who have never attended such an event previously. Feedback from event participants is very positive, with almost all expressing their desire to attend another.

The project has established a professional and informative website and an engaging social media presence which draws people both to its events and its specialised nature and wellbeing sessions. Staff have built referral pathways by promoting The Bay's work to social prescribers. Data from those attending the sessions suggests it is successfully engaging with people scoring in the lowest 15% of the population regarding wellbeing, and that taking part in the project is associated with significant improvements in wellbeing. With an upward trend in referrals in recent months the project is expected to meet its target of 432 people attending regularly and benefitting from their participation by the end of its initial two-year phase. It has also gained the commitment of ten former participants as peer volunteers, who attend weekly sessions and use their lived experience and burgeoning skills to support others.

The project has, on 284 occasions, involved people in positive actions for nature, ranging from clearing bags of litter from beaches to planting seedlings and conducting citizen science surveys. It may have inspired many more through its direct engagement with people and, indirectly, through the information and downloadable resources available on its website.

Over the short time evaluated, and despite the post of Business Development Manager not being filled, The Bay's staff have managed to design and set up trials for three ways of generating income, and to put in major funding bids to develop and continue the project's work.

The Bay is doing important work, and doing it well. While there are aspects to be improved upon, and there is more to learn, it has in a short time secured the support of local people as volunteers, established itself as reliable and useful service for the delivery of green social prescriptions, and engaged large numbers of people with their local environment and actions for nature. We look forward to seeing its further development, both building on its successes and sharing lessons with other coastal communities, for the benefit of people and nature.

Appendix 1: References

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Appendix 2: Project documents for the blueprint toolbox

We list here some project documents that could be usefully shared as part of the project's blueprint, perhaps as part of an online toolbox of resources.

Nature & Wellbeing Officer's admin and session checklist

N&W registration process docs

N&W goal setting process

N&W participation journey process

N&W group code of behaviour

N&W participant questionnaire

The Bay Paperwork procedure for Session Delivery

Community Engagement Officer's checklist

Social media guidelines

CE feedback form

Role descriptions for

N&W Officers

CE Officers

Trainees

Programme Manager

Green Wellbeing Volunteers

CE Volunteers

Lead Volunteers