



Hakeford Woods Forest School CIC

(Postal Address) 48 Wrafton, Braunton, Devon. EX33 2DE.

(Forest School Site Address) **Hakeford, Between Chelfham Mill and
Stoke Rivers, Barnstaple EX327LB**

Tel: 07754538415 email: hakefordwoods@gmail.com

Website: www.hakefordwoods.co.uk

19 August 2022

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Stuart Young and I am founder and director of Hakeford Woods Forest School CIC which is located 10 minutes from Barnstaple in North Devon

Hakeford Woods Forest School began operating in Autumn 2015, initially we were primarily working with children from local alternative provision schools with a variety of issues that prevent them from accessing mainstream education. As well as this "alternative provision" offering we also provide holiday clubs, short programmes for mainstream schools, individual sessions for school groups and some family days, where we provide the opportunity for local families to spend positive time together enjoying the outdoors.

The Wellbeing in Nature Project for adults struggling with mental health and social isolation
Following a number of enquiries from different agencies, and several encouraging conversations with organisations running similar sessions in different parts of the country began offering a "Wellbeing in Nature" programme at Hakeford Woods in the Autumn of 2017. These sessions provide opportunities for adults experiencing challenges with their mental health to take part in a variety of different activities in the woodland environment on a regular basis. Initially the sessions were run voluntarily for approximately 3 months. After obtaining some small amounts of funding we began again after Easter 2018. Since then we have been running continually every Thursday in term time.

Through the years since 2018, grant funding support from Recovery Devon, Sanctuary Housing, The Devon Community Foundation, The Big Lottery and Tesco's Bags of Help, local councillors, The Alpkit Foundation and some other funders have enabled us to secured enough funding to ensure that we will be able to run the regular weekly sessions until the spring of 2023.

Since we have been running the Wellbeing in Nature programme we have operated an open door policy, where participants can refer themselves, or be referred by other organisations. The participants come from a wide variety of backgrounds with a range of mental health and social difficulties. We have had referrals from Intagr8 in Bideford, Education Link, PLUSS, individual GPs, Link centres and through others including supported living providers for clients with mental health difficulties and dependency issues.

The sessions and how they run are very dependent on the clients and their specific needs and requirements on that day. It is common for us to have a guided craft type of activity available, including whittling, wood carving, weaving etc. We also try to have a job type of activity for some of the group. Many of these are long term unemployed and very keen to "work" and contribute in some way. These jobs can include things such as tree planting, hedgelaying, spreading woodchip, tree tagging, building structures and general site maintenance. Other activities that may be included are nature based activities, woodland walks, animal tracking, playing games and carrying out nature connection type activities. Every session includes a warm lunch cooked by members of the group on the campfire and the opportunity to spend time socialising around the campfire.

We are currently planning to begin offering a regular series of volunteering type sessions to run on a different day to the Wellbeing in Nature Project. It has been apparent through the Wellbeing in Nature

Project and other sessions that there is a real desire for the opportunity to volunteer/help with our kind of facility. This desire is particularly apparent in the adults who have spent a significant amount of time out of employment due to mental health or social issues. Several people have spoken to us about how they'd really like to help or volunteer more in whatever capacity they can. Due to the nature of the volunteers it has become clear that these volunteering sessions will need to be supported by experienced staff as many of the volunteers are keen to help, but often lacking in specific skills, strength and confidence. As such the staff will need to ensure that the jobs and tasks are suitably prepared for the volunteers to carry out the necessary work. Initially we intend to offer these sessions as a pilot programme funded with some of our Wellbeing in Nature funding but would like to try to obtain a grant to specifically fund this programme.

We are very keen to work with the local members of the medical professions to ensure that we are providing a service that is of value to the local community, particularly those that struggle in many aspects of their life due to mental health and social difficulties. We would welcome visits from medical professionals and members of One Northern Devon who may have contact with clients who could benefit from some of the sessions that we are offering. Visits could either be when sessions are running, or just for a site visit to chat about what we are able to offer.

If you would like more information or to discuss any of the things on offer at Hakeford Woods please don't hesitate to get in touch.

I hope that this new opportunity will be of interest to your colleagues and we look forward to helping members of the local community gain positive outdoor experiences in the near future.

Yours faithfully

Stuart Young

On the following pages I have included quotes from attendees at our sessions, a testimonial from one of our regular attendees and a report on an incident where the benefits of the impacts of nature on the client was particularly apparent.

“It was really good, a lot of my anger felt lifted”

“It’s awesome”

“When you are making something, you are just concentrating on that – you are able to focus and you don’t think about your problems”

“It was good to do something together – like we were bonding”

“It was therapeutic, carving wood was really calming”

“I felt stress release when I was there”

“I enjoyed it, it made me feel motivated”

“I felt happy, the only thing that could improve it – is if it was longer”

“Since I’ve been coming to these sessions I’ve felt able to go for a walk in the park and to cafes for a cup of tea, I haven’t been able to do that for a few years”

“Helping out with jobs makes me feel more confident”

Letter of recommendation for Hakeford Woods Forest School "Well Being in Nature" program

To whom it may concern,

My name is Matthew Wallin and I am a regular attendee of Hakeford Well Being in nature program and would like to share my thanks and show my support for this program. First here is my story. After being diagnosed with recurrent depression mid 2018 which has been affecting me since my early 20s I started taking anti-depressants and started to work with Depression and anxiety service here in Barnstaple. With my work there it became clear I was spending little time on my own personal wellbeing and development as a person as my whole adult life had become to an end as I knew it. This was a dark time for me, to the point I started to question my life and what effect I actually have. As part of this work I was advised to spend more time on doing things I enjoy which didn't include development of my business as being self-employed I dedicated a lot of time to it. My business is a personal training and manual therapy business where I work with people whom suffer with a lot of anxiety issues and I help a lot of people deal with their pain and aim to get them out of this. This is a very personal business and I have a very good relationship with my clients, as it allows them to share their worries, corners and also to off load things on their mind. Without my knowing so I absorb a lot of stress from my work not only from running my business but from contact with my clients and taking in their issues, problems and emotions. I have struggled to release those stresses and emotions and have held onto them.

When I found the wellbeing program in mid-2018, I was really exciting to go as it seems right up my street. I love being in the wood and within nature and knowing the literature backing of being in nature for mental health being very positive. The setup is amazing and the organisation is great. Having the freedom to do what you want but also having the choice for doing a pre-planned activity or piece of work is really important. This freedom allows you to do what you want if you have an idea you want to explore or if you're unsure or new or just what to go with the flow of the session you can do the pre-planned activity. Stuart and Georgie do an amazing job to help everyone at the sessions and it is very easy to create flow within the sessions as we frequently lose track of time. The fact that it is not a rigid program where you have to attend when signing up creates a very comfortable environment and takes away any stress if you don't wish to attend one week (I have yet not wanted to go).

As mentioned above I have been a regular weekly attendee of the program and it has become a part of my routine in life. It helps maintain my mental stability during the week and helps bring me back to normal during stressful periods. The flow I find at the sessions is exactly what I need and I achieve it every week here. This allows me to release the stress I have taken on from life, work and what my clients have told me. With the work I have done during the year and with the help of this program I am now no longer taking the anti-depressants and am completely medication free, which is a huge achievement. I am happy to say that this program has extremely helped and continue to help me every week and is a part of weekly maintenance. For me this program is extremely important!

If you would like to contact me for more information on my experience please do so via the contact details below as I am happy to help this program in any way or form.

07925696787 / mattwallin@hotmail.co.uk

Matthew Wallin BSc



Report on changes seen in an attendee at one of the Woodland Wellbeing sessions at Hakeford Woods.

I'd just like to share what happened at one of our Wellbeing groups for adults this week, which really demonstrated for us the "healing power of the woods". It'll be a bit of a long one but really showed us why we are doing this work.

A bit of background first: This was the second week of this new programme for adults who are long term unemployed. The young lady concerned lives in supported accommodation for people with drug and alcohol issues and she'd attended last week with others from her supported living placement. The group who attended last week were high when they arrived last week and trying to find opportunities to get stoned last week, we confronted the issue and explained that it wasn't acceptable and couldn't happen again. The young lady "S" is 22, she got excluded from school in year 8 and never went back to school in any form, from later conversations she's been on hard drugs and involved in gangs and crime since that age, she has a child who is probably about 5 who is in care but she has supervised visits with and she's trying to turn her life around after losing a close friend to drugs on Christmas Day a couple of years ago.

The group arrived by minibus and S was very angry and had been shouting and swearing on the bus, making the others feel quite uncomfortable (she was the only one from her supported accommodation this week). I was preparing the fire and heard her coming down the track shouting about the mud and complaining. It turns out that she was on the phone (unfortunately with the only phone network that actually works on site). She sat at the fire on the phone having a loud, swearsy conversation without any regard for the others in the group. Eventually after working out a plan, my colleague asked her to go and have the conversation away from the group as it was making people uncomfortable, which she did. Eventually she finished her call and came back and wasn't happy, with the rest of the group we'd discussed what we might do and were planning on some craft and whittling type activities. S started off by saying she doesn't like the woods, or mud, or sticks, or getting her £190 trainers muddy etc, she said the only reason she had come was to get away from the guys she lives with and she doesn't want to end up going to prison. I asked her what she did like doing: "I can't tell you that" (drugs I assume). She said she'd do something with glitter but doesn't want to get dirty. I suggested that we don't have glitter but we do have autumn leaves. She was unconvinced! Eventually I managed to cajole her to join with the others and we'd go collecting some leaves to do something with. She went ahead, slowly collecting leaves and putting them in her bag, I followed along doing the same but giving her space and occasionally commenting on something or showing her some different types of leaf. After about 10 minutes her whole demeanour had completely changed, I asked how she was feeling and she said expressed how she was enjoying it, it had cleared her head and she was focussing on what she was doing, not worrying about anything else. The walk around the site probably took 20 minutes, when we got back we sat down and talked about the leaves, which ones she liked the most, then with a bit of initial guidance she spent the next 20 minutes making patterns with the autumn leaves.

From that point on she was a completely different person, she did make another phone call and sat on her own a bit, but she engaged with the group, talked about how much better it made her feel and apologised for how she was earlier. When we were sat around eating lunch she told us about her life, her problems, her son and what she hopes for the future. When she left she was so pleased with herself and was really keen to make sure that she comes back, she had really recognised how much better it made her feel and how it could help her.

We know that she quite possibly won't get back every week, that she's likely to arrive in highly agitated states and it won't be a smooth road, but seeing how being in the woods can allow someone to change so dramatically (in the short term at this stage) really demonstrated the power of what we are providing in this kind of "Green Care" session.