



Survey of nature-based activities in the East Midlands region

Researchers at the University of Nottingham School of Health Sciences have completed a survey of the nature-based activities currently available in the East Midlands region¹. This online survey was distributed directly to organisations found through local networks, search engines, and word of mouth (April-July 2022). It was also circulated through provider networks and social media. The findings provide a snapshot of the inspiring activities going on around the region. Findings also suggest that nature activities could be appropriate to support women during pregnancy.

The survey found 68 nature-based projects or organisations operating across the East Midlands, with 94% of these stating that the activity is designed to promote mental health and wellbeing. There are a mix of different projects such as gardening, walking, and arts groups. There are also projects based in forests and farms, and many offering multiple activities to suit different groups.



- Nature activity projects are well established with half running for over 5 years
- Most organisations do not charge any fees for their service or subsidise it for those who cannot pay
- Organisations have a mix of funding models but are commonly reliant on charitable grants, fundraising, and funds from government bodies.
- Around half of these projects are at risk of closing due to lack of or short-term funding.

¹ Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire, and Rutland



Many of the organisations evaluate their services either internally or with external partners such as universities. For some this is quite informal, by gathering testimonials and monitoring numbers attending. Others collect data through wellbeing scales, case studies, and follow-up with attendees over time.

Around three out of four organisations had plans or aspirations to scale up. Difficulties were noted in terms of acquiring longer term funding, availability and training of staff or volunteers, and levels of interest from the community. Some organisations also saw the increasing interest in green prescribing as an opportunity for expansion.

People could gain access to the nature activities through a range of different routes, with some organisations happy for people to just turn up on the day. Other routes of access included via social or green prescribing link workers, other professional referral, or self-referral. Some projects were focused on particular groups of people, health challenges, or locality; but many were open to all those who felt they could benefit.

This work is part of a larger project looking at spending time in nature during pregnancy. As such, we asked whether nature activities are either currently available for pregnant women and people or could be adapted for this group. The vast majority of organisations felt that this would be possible, and many welcomed the idea of nature-activities during pregnancy and after birth. Almost all organisations were happy to be contacted in relation to future research. This demonstrates their interest in adding to the evidence base around nature activities and their impact on health and wellbeing.

For more information about ongoing research in this area, please contact the project lead, Dr Gina Sands (gina.sands@nottingham.ac.uk).

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