

LASMUIGH

Issue 4, November 2023



Professional Practice Journal for the Outdoor Sector on the Island of Ireland

Special Edition

Outdoor Therapeutic Activity Providers' Conference

Friday 10th of November

in ATU Mayo Campus





Outdoor Therapeutic Activity Providers Network Ireland

Programme Overview

2023

Autumn Conference

10th of November

Registration and opening	09:30 - 10:00
Master of Ceremonies introduces Dr Justin Kerr, Vice President of ATU	10:00 - 10:10
The Outdoor Therapeutic Activity Providers (OTAP) Network with Barry Dillon & Raymond Burke	10:10 - 10:30
Keynote Speaker – Stephan Natynczuk, Solution focussed Therapies	10:30 - 11:15
Coffee & Poster Presentations	11:15 - 11:45
Keynote Speaker - Andy Hardie, Former Clinical Manager of Venture Trust in the United Kingdom	11:45 - 12:30
Lunch	12:30 - 13:30
Themed Presentations (participants have prebooked into each themed presentation)	13:30 - 15:00
WATER BLUE SPACE - 3 talks x 20 Minutes each	
1. Tessa Kingston - Blue Space - Sailing Into wellness - using sailing as a therapeutic platform for personal, social and community development.	
2. Jasmin Stallard – Director, Project Lead @ New Wave Wild Project – Outdoor therapies and the Biopsychosocial model.	
3. Liquid Therapy - Erasmus project INCLUSEA - Adaption and best practice toolkits.	
WOODLANDS GREEN SPACE - 3 talks x 20 Minutes each	
1. Jenny Beale - Director of Brigit's Garden - Nature connection for wellbeing.	
2. John Fortune - Discovery Project, an experimental community-based, multi-agency adventure project for 'at-risk' young people, funded by the Department of Justice.	
3. Philip Stallard – Director, Adventure Therapist @ New Wave Wild Project – Physical and psychological safety in blue and green spaces.	
MOUNTAINS WILDERNESS - 3 talks x 20 Minutes each	
1. Quentin Weaver - Mountain/wilderness space for learning/education at Comeragh Wilderness Academy.	
2. Nick Lenane – Co-Founder of the Venture Out Wilderness Project – Insights and challenges into running Multi day Personal Development and Therapeutic Expeditions.	
3. Ray Burke - Active Connections - An evidence base to outdoor therapeutic interventions.	
INCLUSIVE OUTDOOR THERAPY - 3 talks x 20 Minutes each	
1. Dr. Sorcha Ni Bhrudair - Blue Space - Surf2Heal: An investigation into the impact of outdoor therapy on the social behaviours of those with Autism Spectrum Disorder.	
2. Clare Hayden - Meitheal Mara and their Badoireacht Youth Programme.	
3. Avril Leonard - Venture Trust 'Meeting the client where they are at' taking 1-2-1 therapy to people's local green and blue spaces.	
Final Gathering – Looking to the future. Master of Ceremonies with Raymond Burke, Barry Dillon, Stephan Natynczuk, Andie Hardie	15:00 - 15:30



The Training Link programme is funded from the National Training Fund through the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.



An Bliain Brícheallachais agus Ardchoilteála, Taispeáin, Meitheal agus Coláistea (Departments of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science)

This event has been organized by the Outdoor Therapeutic Providers Network, supported by the Wheel's Programme, Funding Stream.



Stronger Charities, Stronger Communities.

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| Editorial

Hello again,

Welcome to the fourth edition of Lasmuigh the professional practice journal for the outdoor sector on the Island of Ireland. If this is the first time you have come across this journal you may wish to have a look at the earlier editions on the website www.Lasmuigh.com.

This is the first Special Edition of Lasmuigh, and it marks the significant occasion of the first conference for the Outdoor Therapeutic Activity Providers Network of Ireland (OTAP). This conference was held in ATU Mayo Campus on Friday 10th November 2023. The contents of this special edition are the summaries of the presentations at the conference.

This edition begins with an overview of the OTAP network, followed by a summary of the keynote presentations. The main body of presentations are then presented and categorised for convenience into Water-Blue Space Presentations, Woodlands – Green Space Presentations and Mountain and Wilderness Space Presentations. This categorisation reflects the themes used in the 'breakout rooms' during the conference. In another first for Lasmuigh, a limited run of hard copies were produced, the cost of which was borne by ATU Mayo Campus. These copies were made available to attendees at the conference free of charge.

One of the key characteristics of an emerging profession is the desire to improve practice and knowledge in a sector; to share ideas of good practice; to evaluate one's practice, and to strive for continual improvement. It is heartening to see those involved in therapeutic provision in the outdoors, on the island of Ireland, coming together to do just that. It takes courage to put pen to paper describing your practice and then to present your ideas before peers and the wider public. As an emerging profession, the writers and presenters deserve great credit for taking this first step on the road to continual development and improvement.

Lasmuigh as a professional practice journal aims to inform and reflect the field of outdoor education on the Island of Ireland and beyond by reporting on and sharing good practice. Our values in Lasmuigh are rooted in exploring encounters in nature that facilitate empathy and connection, which inspire engagement, challenge existing assumptions, and foster activism that is beneficial to nature and society. The approaches described in this special edition of Lasmuigh seem to fit with these values with 'nature' described as a crucial partner in the therapeutic process rather than a mere backdrop to the process. It could be that therapeutic work in the outdoors will further understanding of our interdependence on nature, and how our own health and the health of the planet are interconnected.

We hope you enjoy reading this special issue,
Stephen



Meet the editorial panel of Lasmuigh, The Professional Practice Journal

Stephen Hannon lectures on the BA in Outdoor Education and the MSc in Outdoor Education, Sustainability and Well Being at the Mayo Campus of the Atlantic Technological University (ATU). Stephen lectures in the areas of experiential learning, expeditionary education and facilitation. He has a particular interest in place-based pedagogy as a way of making outdoor practice responsive to where it is located and as a means of engaging people with their own local environment.



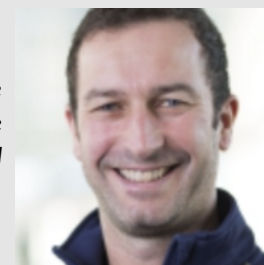
Shirley Gleeson is the Director of Ecowellness Consulting and Nádúr Centre for Integrative Forest Therapy. She has a Masters in both health promotion and social work and has worked for twenty years in health and social care, specialising in adult mental health. She designs, implements and evaluates nature based interventions for positive mental health. She is a member of the Advisory Committee of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas Health and Well-being Specialist Group. Community Ambassador for Nature Based Solutions (NBS) for the Health and Well-being Community in the Connecting Nature Enterprise Platform. Shirley is a speaker and ambassador on the topic of nature and wellbeing presenting to the United Nations expert group on green jobs in the forestry sector. She has presented her work at international conferences throughout Europe.

Dr John Pierce has been a lecturer in the department of Health & Leisure Studies at Munster Technological University for over ten years. He lectures in outdoor learning across three different degree programmes. He has also spent a lot of his career training adventure sports practitioners and instructors.



Ciara Munnely is the outdoor recreation manager in Outdoors unit in Sport Ireland. She is currently leading on national projects with significant impact including the development of a National Digital Database, National Trails Register and Trails Development. She is also involved in the working group developing the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, working closely with various Government Departments and stakeholders. Ciara is an avid horse rider and has completed up to Grand Prix level in Show jumping. She also played rugby for a number of years and gained a cap playing for Leinster. In recent years, she has gained a broader appreciation of the outdoors and has travelled all over Ireland hillwalking and trying out new outdoor activities.

Robin Greg based in Ulster University is a Lecturer in Outdoor Adventure and Coaching. Robin is Course Director for the BSc (Hons) Outdoor Adventure programme based at Ulster's Coleraine campus and run-in partnership with Tollymore National Outdoor Centre. Robin is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, a British Canoe Union National Trainer and is happiest when surfing.



Emer Carton is an adventure sports enthusiast and has been a participant and instructor in sailing, windsurfing, rock climbing and kayaking at various stages since 2008. She has graduated from Colaiste Dhulaigh with a HND in Adventure Education, and from Chichester University with a BA Honours Degree in Adventure Education and Facilitation. More recently she has completed the Sport Ireland Instructor Developer Training and is completing a diploma in Life and Executive Coaching & Mentoring.

Emer is based in Kerry and a member of Kerry Canoe Club. Her passion is for helping underrepresented groups of people to gain access to adventure sports. Her current professional role is as the Diversity and Inclusion Manager and Women in Sport Lead with Canoeing Ireland, helping to make paddle sports accessible to all.

The editorial panel of Lasmuigh continued...



Mike McClure works for Sport Northern Ireland with a remit for developing outdoor sports in the North and is based at Tollymore National Outdoor Centre. His background is in Environmental Science and he worked in the field of outdoor and environmental education for over 20 years. Mike is also currently the chairman of the European Network of Outdoor Sports (ENOS) and has been involved in a range of pan-European Projects. He is passionate about engaging people with nature and communicating about the importance of ecosystem services, nature-based solutions for sustainability and restoration of biodiversity.

Dr Sarah O'Malley is an EU Projects Officer with Limerick City and County Council, Ireland. The projects focus on implementing nature based solutions and developing green infrastructure in urban/city areas. She has lectured and worked in the areas of outdoor learning, (dis)connection with nature, environmental sociology, education, disability and inclusion. She has published on these subjects. In her spare time, she is by, in, or on the sea!



Dr Cormac Doran is the Head of the Graduate Studies Office (Assistant Academic Secretary) at Trinity College Dublin. He has been involved in outdoor learning for over 25 years as a lecturer, youth worker, researcher, instructor and consultant. His previous role was leading a research centre between Ireland and Canada which followed roles as a Head of Department in TU Dublin as well as lecturing in various institutions in Ireland and internationally. Cormac's main research areas are in higher education theory and practice, community, youth and the outdoors and he is consistently looking at ways to create new knowledge for those who venture outside.

Mairéad Cluskey is a lecturer on the BA (Hons) in Outdoor Education and other programmes in the Department of Environmental Humanities and Social Sciences on the Mayo Campus of the Atlantic Technological University. Prior to her role in ATU, Mairéad worked as a professional Community and Youth Worker and lectured in TU Dublin in the areas of Youth Work, Community Development, Management, Research, Child Protection, Child Development and Family Support. Mairéad has a particular interest in the professional formation of students in value-based professions, to support an engagement with people and planet that is concerned with positive social change.



Karol Quinn works as the Learning and Evaluation Programme Manager with a responsibility for the quality of Adventure Journeys with Gaisce, The Irish President's Award. He has worked in Outdoor Education for over twenty years as both a volunteer and a professional youth worker with Scouting Ireland. He has been involved in a number initiatives such as the Dublin Mountains Initiative for the development of the Dublin Mountain as a recreational space. His passion is working with young people to develop hill walking and backwoods skills.

Lasmuigh - Our Values

What is Lasmuigh?

Lasmuigh is a professional practice journal that aims to both inform and reflect the field of outdoor education on the island of Ireland by reporting on and sharing good practice in Irish outdoor education. The publication serves as a commitment to the ongoing development of practice, to sharing ideas and innovations, and to promoting an awareness of Irish and international research on outdoor practice. Lasmuigh seeks to engage with and be inclusive of all those who share the outdoor setting for experiences be they recreational, developmental, educational, or therapeutic.

“Lasmuigh seeks to engage with and be inclusive of all those who share the outdoor setting for experiences be they recreational, developmental, educational, or therapeutic.”



Values

We thought it was important to outline what we are about in terms of our values and what we are hoping to promote through this publication.

- Our values in Lasmuigh are rooted in exploring encounters in nature that facilitate empathy and connection, which inspire engagement, challenge existing assumptions, and foster activism that is beneficial to nature and society.
- These values are borne out of a respect for and understanding of our interconnectedness and dependence on nature.
- These values encourage a shift away from an emphasis on the economic and unsustainable benefits humans derive from engagement with nature and a move towards a more eco-centric view of the world.
- Lasmuigh values place and outdoor experiences that interrogate our sense of place and sense of connection to place. It seems important for an outdoor journal that is based in Ireland to value the power of place and the deep connections it can bring.
- Lasmuigh values making meaningful outdoor experiences available to all.
- Finally, Lasmuigh values critical reflection to develop understanding and improve practice.

Call for Submissions

What are our aims?

Lasmuigh aims to:

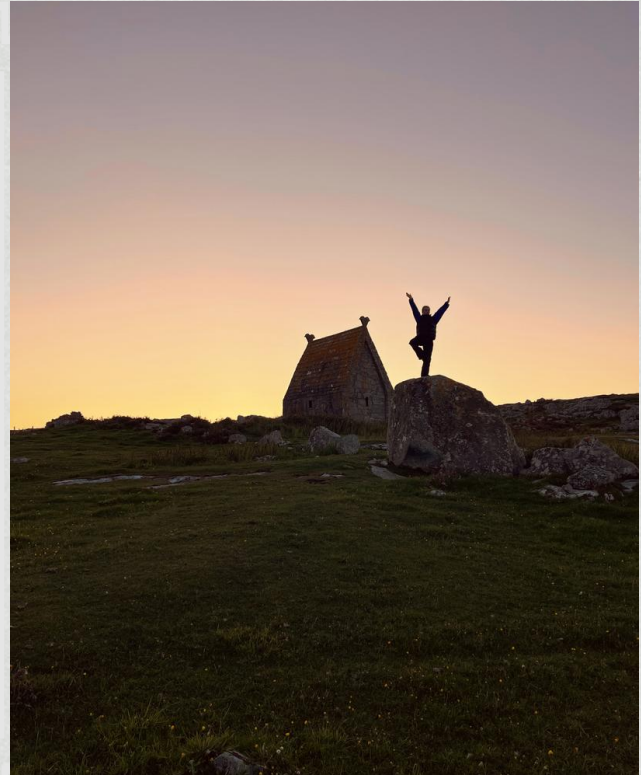
1. Provide a means of communicating good practice for those who share the outdoor setting for their work.
2. Explore how outdoor practice can be place-based in an Irish context by sharing programme examples that celebrate place.
3. Provide a platform for Irish Outdoor Education research that will publicise an evidence base for practice in all areas of outdoor practice.
4. Create opportunities for connection and discussion between those who work in the increasingly rich and diverse outdoor sector in Ireland and beyond.



[**lasmuighjournal@gmail.com**](mailto:lasmuighjournal@gmail.com)

[**https://lasmuigh.com**](https://lasmuigh.com)

[**Lasmuigh Podcast**](#)



In keeping with our values at Lasmuigh we aspire to publish content that engages with the broad range of those who work in the outdoor sector and encourage submissions ranging from ideas for practice to submissions that seek to expand the evidence base for outdoor interventions. In keeping with the inclusive values of Lasmuigh artwork, poetry and book reviews related to the outdoor sector are also encouraged. There is more detailed guidance available for potential contributors [here](#) and advice on the types submissions [here](#).

Lasmuigh will be published twice each year, in the Spring and in the Autumn. If you are interested in submitting to Lasmuigh here are an abridged version of our submission guidance:

- We recommend 2/4 images per submission.
- Recommended word count – 1000 - 2000 words.
- Please include personal bio – 50 words.
- Submissions for the fifth edition should reach the editors by 1st February 2024.
- The next edition will go live in mid-April.

There are many different ways to become involved in this publication

- Submit a book review, poem or artwork.
- Submit an article on some research you have conducted.
- Submit a story of your professional journey.
- Submit an account of a project or an example of good practice that you are responsible for.
- Apply to be a member of the editorial board.
- Send in ideas for the further development of the publication.

"we aspire to publish content that engages with the broad range of those who work in the outdoor sector"

What does the word *Lasmuigh* mean?

The word means on the outside or outdoors or without. We chose the word for the title of this publication because we thought it was inclusive of the broad outdoor sector and also as an acknowledgement that the publication is based on the island of Ireland.

Outdoor Therapeutic Activity Providers Network & Training Links - Project Overview

Barry Dillon

About the Author

Barry is the co-founder of Venture Out Wilderness Project, a profit-for-purpose social enterprise, established in 2016 to alleviate disadvantage through the provision of a creative range of outdoor based social support focused programmes. Barry has a Masters in Family Support along with a range of lead qualifications in outdoor adventure activities. For the training links project, Barry has taken on the role of project coordinator.

Outdoor Therapies in Ireland

In a recent study, mapping and profiling outdoor therapies in Ireland, while also gauging the insights of practitioners on the ground, it was evident that a significant number of organisations operated within this field. It was also recognised that a broad and varied range of ‘outdoor’ therapeutic approaches were currently being practiced across Island.

These include Adventure Therapy, Eco-Psychology, Forest Therapy, Nature-Based Therapy, Surf Therapy, Therapeutic Sailing, and Wilderness Therapy. In addition, approaches such as animals assisted therapies, horticulture therapy and occupational therapy practices were identified.

Kingston T., Coffey A., Grosu A., (2021) An Exploration into the use of Outdoor Therapies in Ireland: A Mixed Methods Study, Lasmuigh, Issue 3, April 2023.

OTAP (Outdoor Therapeutic Activity Providers)

A key recommendation of the study was the fostering of closer working relationships between the various organisations to help with challenges related to funding and to promote wider recognition. To improve collaboration and information sharing between these organisations, and to drive best practice and the industry as a whole, a number of organisations operating within this space came together in 2022 to formally establish the Outdoor Therapeutic Activity Providers Network of Ireland.

10 organisations came together to form the network and in their first in-person meeting in November 2022, they set about developing ‘Terms of reference’ and a series of actions. These organisations included; Venture Out Wilderness Project, Active Connections, Sailing into Wellness, New Wave Wild Project, Liquid Therapy, The RISE project, Commeragh Wilderness Camp, Brigits Garden, Meitheal Mara, and Surf 2 Heal.

The main objective of the OTAP Network is to improve and embed links between Network members to ensure that members will shape and improve their supports, and best practice in the area of outdoor therapeutic activity.

Each of the organisations were already legally formed as CLG’s or cooperatives, and were operating as social enterprises, registered charities and/or not for profit businesses. It was agreed within the network that organisations seeking to join in the future must also have a similar legal structure and approach to operations and governance.



Training Links and The Wheel

The network successfully applied to the ‘The Wheel’s’ Training Links funding stream, and set about scheduling a number of in person and online training, networking and information sharing initiatives to support management, staff and volunteers of each of the 10 organisations to improve their practice, skills and knowledge.

Throughout 2022 - 2023, the Network successfully scheduled and delivered a number of actions which included;

- 3 x in person continuous professional development training sessions
- 5 x Online talk series sessions – involving international expert speakers
- 1 x In person end of project conference (attendance of 160+)
- Creation of a professional Website for the Network

<https://outdoor-therapeutic-activity-providers.webflow.ie/>

By project end, in early 2024, it is envisioned that approx 350+ staff, management, volunteers, trustees and students will have attended at least one of these events.

Looking to the Future - 2024

Looking to the future, the Network plan to continue their collaborative work, aiming to promote, improve and professionalise the practice of outdoor therapies across the island of Ireland. Many opportunities now exist to work collaboratively on issues relating to public relations, advocacy, training, qualifications and accreditation, funding, policy shaping, insurance, approach recognition and operations.

The benefits of such a working relationship are clearly evident from the engagement of member organisations, their staff and volunteers, and the general public over the past 12 months. The network very much intend to continue their work, expanding its membership and undertaking more ambitious projects into the future.

KEYNOTE: Practitioner Wisdom with added WoWWW Factor (Working With What Works)



Stephan Natynczuk, *Spare Krab*, Ironbridge, UK.

About the author - A Professional Journey

I became a professional experiential educator in 1988 as a school based Scientist-in-Residence, working with schools encouraging young people to let their creativity and curiosity flourish by discovering things that nobody knew before. I soon learned this work was especially useful for young people experiencing poverty of opportunity, and I realised that I could do small things that might contribute to the sort of society I would prefer to live in. This has been my primary motivation for prosocial and therapeutic work ever since. Gradually I collected qualifications in teaching, therapy, supervision, many adventure leadership awards, and business administration to work towards my personal vision of the complete adventure therapist.

What I do in my Private Practice

My private practice, *Spare Krab*, focuses on young people “who don't read good and want to do other things good too” my favourite quote from *Zoolander*. I generally work with SEN pupils at risk. Occasionally I work therapeutically outdoors with adults, though most of my non-school work is training for adventure leadership, especially underground, training in Solution Focused Practice (SFP) both indoors and outdoors, training practitioners to work outdoors therapeutically, and supervision.

Presentation

In this presentation I want to illustrate how practitioner wisdom rather than practice wisdom informs my every day work, concentrating on the most important day, specifically the induction for new referrals from the Aspire Academy, Worcester, UK.

Informing Practitioner Wisdom

As I work in education, pedagogy is important, and mine is informed by Dewey, Vygotsky, and Freire, summarised by Beames & Brown (2016). I would particularly like to highlight the factors dealing with authenticity, agency and responsibility, dealing with uncertainty, and mastery through challenge, which are central to my work. The overlap between pedagogy and the therapeutic approach I adopt is summarised by the characteristics of the Child and Youth Care approach (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012). Attention is paid to developing both Individual and Social Capital as outlined in the DfE Character Education framework (2019).

Professionalism and Constructing Practitioner Wisdom

At this conference we are all outdoor therapeutic activity providers, or perhaps I should say professionals. We all construct our professionalism differently (Natynczuk, 2016, 2020, 2024) as well as our values-based practitioner wisdom (Kwong, & Fawson, 2022). We provide activities outdoors that have an intrinsic therapeutic quality, whether it is planned or not. Sometimes just being outdoors can be refreshing enough to help those we work with feel good and capable. That sort of therapy can be accidental, however, if it works it is good is it not?

When we add, as a minimum, safe, caring, sharing, practice informed by good listening skills, and Rogerian core conditions we can begin to be deliberate with our therapeutic content. Deliberate therapeutic practice is not accidental, by definition.

If we say there is a therapeutic component to our work it follows that clients, parents, other professionals, and commissioners will expect something that helps in some way, something therapeutic, something based on sound values, backed by evidence, with a solid theoretical and practical basis, reproducible, helpful, and ethical, (Natynczuk & Dobud 2020).

To me therapy has been useful if the person we are working with finishes our session feeling better about themselves, and better able to cope with life as they experience it. That sounds like a good day at work, and both practitioner and client can have a little extra happiness, sense of purpose, sense of accomplishment, capability, affirmation, and improved self-efficacy.

We always learn from those we serve and I suggest that it is more than ok for us to enjoy our work and to transmit that joy to others: we are all role models too. It seems that people working in the outdoor industry largely do so because they, themselves, received something helpful from outdoor activities and adventure sports, they understand the benefits for themselves and want to help others benefit too.

Aspirant practitioners seek training in skills, leadership, rescue, guiding, coaching, and how to facilitate outdoor learning in a fun and safe way in a variety of environments. They pay attention to networking and their continuing professional development. It is powerful stuff. Though beware to remember whose adventure it is, and who ought to benefit most from the work.

There is a temptation to model adventure work on what I call the *Wilderness Olympics*: that is the temptation to hijack the work and to go higher, deeper, hotter, colder, dryer, wetter, muddier, more peaks, steeper, more rope, longer, faster, further, scarier: not for the client's benefit, for the instructor's, the one who is being paid for 'doing adventures' so seeks their own adventure thrills largely ignoring the client. Co-adventuring for change gets defenestrated. Clients taught me *Less is More*: there needs to be time for talking, healing, resting, working things out, enjoying just being, and evidencing a preferred future based on realisable change. The work is meant to be therapeutic for the client's benefit.

I have written about Host Leadership (HL) elsewhere (Natynczuk 2019, Dobud & Natynczuk, 2023, pp.75-80, Natynczuk & Dobud, 2024) and it is very helpful to have a leadership model that compliments the therapeutic modality entirely. HL suggests reframing clients as guests and definitely leads to a more inclusive and service based relationship: an evolution beyond the Servant Leadership model. One's professional relationship, especially built on agreeing and honouring the practitioner-client contract is fundamental to developing good engagement. Good engagement leads to good outcomes. Good outcomes lead to happier people, including the practitioner. Feedback Informed Treatment is the way we courageously check with clients that our work is appropriate, timely, effective, and that we are indeed working only for our client's best interests (Dobud and Natynczuk, 2023, pp.182-201).

Silence can be useful: sometimes talking is not possible, strong winds, horizontal rain and snow, loud waves and falling water can make it difficult to be heard. While not all therapy is based on talking, the unspoken, including moments of natural mindfulness, has to be acknowledged (Natynczuk 2021). Talking, especially the quality of the conversation, can be taken as a measure of the quality of the connection between people and it is how experience is captured and made sense of. We know from research (Tryon, Birch, & Verkuilen, 2018) that agreeing on what is being worked on or 'goal consensus', predicts the quality of outcomes. It is where SF practitioners start, talking about the end of our work together right at the very beginning by asking "At the end of our time together how will you know this work has been useful for you?" Questions like this provide a description of the successful end of our work together, one where the co-adventurer has got what they need from the work and moves on. It is perhaps the key question to being future focused rather than problem focused and ruminating on the past. SFP is also a social therapy, it depends much on conversation and interactions between people. When we add politeness to a conversation, turn taking, listening to understand, respectful curiosity, avoiding confrontation, manipulation, and control, we have the basis for good and useful work about change. These simple, everyday conversational tools can be added to others that make us effective, caring, and facilitative builders of personal development through outdoor activities. They deliberately increase the therapeutic content. All this is, to me, the skill set of therapeutic outdoor activity practitioners: safe adventures and good, useful, conversations. Asking useful questions shifts the responsibility for change on to the person needing it, and they do all the work. We should never work harder than our clients.

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Let's look at some of those essential tools:

Curiosity: What are you good at? What did it take to do that? What difference did that make to you and to those that you care about? What do you want from our time working together? How would you know this is a good use of your time? Curiosity drives good conversation.

If, when, how, suppose, where are good question words. *Why* is not a good question word as it can demand justification, judgement, and is the slippery slope to shame, and that is not at all therapeutic.

'Goal Consensus': Agreeing on what the conversation and the session is about helps keep a focus on useful outcomes for the client, minimises guesswork, increases the chances that something useful will come out of the talking and doing, and helps us avoid 'baby-sitting' clients. I regard goals as waypoints evidencing the journey towards a better way of being.

Avoiding advice, confrontation, manipulation and control: Who are we trying to be helpful for? If we are client-centred then it is the person we are talking to and working with. Just as the outdoor activity is not our adventure, then the talking is for the client's benefit. Giving clients control for their own benefit helps tackle complex trauma (Pringle, Dobud, & Harper, 2021). Advice is just another form of nostalgia and the work is not about us.

Co-adventuring for Change: SF practitioners talk about co-facilitated change, the work done together. Co-adventuring means the interaction is through action, activity, and adventure. It demands trust, co-responsibility, co-dependence, it reduces the power differential, and is empowering. The client becomes the hero in their own story.

Wrapping up...

At the end of a successful session the client has gained more self-efficacy and is in a better place in themselves, at the very least better placed to move in the direction of the change they want for themselves. We, as practitioners benefit from being secure in our practice wisdom, knowing what works for us in getting the best experiences for the clients we serve through the values that guide us.



KEYNOTE: Outdoor Mental Health Interventions: Frameworks for Futures



Andy Hardie

About the author - A Professional Journey

My early career began in sport, youth and community work in London, moving to outdoor learning in the English Lake District. I moved steadily further North and have worked extensively across the Highlands and islands of Scotland. Much of my work in the outdoors has focussed on personal development and therapeutic work with youth and marginalised groups, particularly care experienced young people, people involved in the criminal justice system and military veterans. I am a Lead Practitioner of the Institute for Outdoor Learning (LPIOL), hold a range of guiding and coaching qualifications in various outdoor activities and a BA(Hons) in Outdoor Leadership.

This work gave me a deep curiosity which led me to explore and undertake further training and education in psychotherapy. I am now a Forensic Psychotherapist and Clinical Supervisor registered with the British Psychoanalytic Council and accredited with the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP). I am coming to the end of my studies for an MSc(R) in Health, Humanities and the Arts at the University of Edinburgh with a focus on environmental arts methodologies when researching the interconnected experiences of place, the natural environment and mental health. I have worked as a Therapist in the private, public and third sectors with groups, adults and young people.

Since 2015 I have been working alongside colleagues to develop wilderness and outdoor therapy approaches in Scotland. Initially as Head Therapist of Venture Mòr, then Clinical Manager of Venture Trust’s outdoor therapy service at its inception and more recently delivering training for professionals. I have developed and delivered undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Adventure Therapy and been Module Leader for an MSc in Counselling. I am now Clinical Director of Lifelink, a charity delivering mental health services across Scotland with oversight of clinical governance, product and service development and quality assurance. I also serve as a Trustee on the Board of Penumbra, another Scottish charity providing dedicated services for people experiencing enduring mental ill health.

The Organisation I work for: lifelink

I am the Clinical Director of Scottish mental health charity, Lifelink. This organisation does not routinely take therapy work outdoors (yet!). We provide commissioned mental health, well-being and reflective practice services within public, private and third sectors including local authority and NHS contracts. We provide services for adults, young people and families in corporate, health, education, community and prison settings.



The Presentation

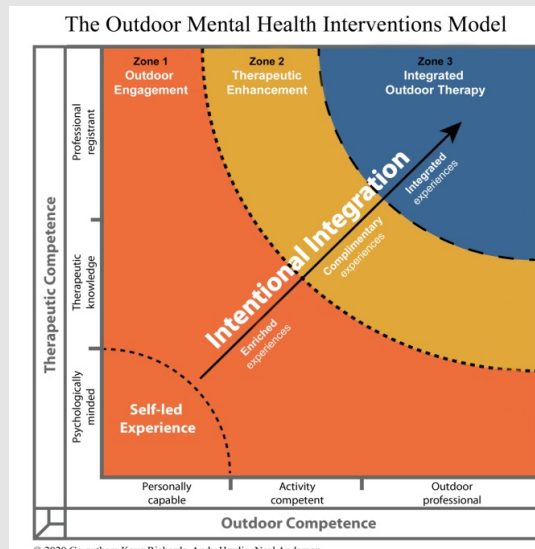
This presentation summarises the development of the statement of good practice for outdoor and adventure therapy, and outdoor mental health interventions, as well as the complimentary report outlining sustainability indicators when utilising nature to promote mental health. The newly constituted UK & Ireland Association for Outdoor Therapy (AOT) will be introduced along with a warmly extended invitation to join. It will provide a brief overview of the rationale for the development of these documents, along with an introduction to how the Outdoor Mental Health Interventions (OMHI) Model offers a framework for practitioners.

The Outdoor Mental Health Interventions Model

The key components of the model will be discussed, including three ‘zones’ of distinct practices that therapeutic outdoor and adventure practices can be approached from:

- 1) therapeutic outdoor engagement;
- 2) therapeutic outdoor enhancement; or
- 3) integrated outdoor therapy.

Questions will be raised about competencies from outdoor and psychotherapeutic perspectives across each of these zones. It will explore further questions about current ethical practices and future directions in ethical guidance for outdoor and adventure therapies and therapeutic practice.



Health, well-being and self-development has been a cornerstone of the impact and value of outdoor learning practices for many decades, not to mention spiritual, ritual and healing practices over millennia. Recent years have brought an exponential growth in therapeutic outdoor initiatives and programmes being developed and utilised for mental health and well-being benefits, perhaps accelerated within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. More recognisable terms such as adventure therapy, wilderness therapy, nature therapy and outdoor counselling, have recently been joined by a collection of wider terms, such as eco-therapy, forest bathing, green prescribing and a Natural Health Service, to name a few. All of these terms are taking claim to some kind of health benefit (physical or psychological) for getting outdoors. The Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL) statement aims to celebrate and champion this broad spectrum of interventions and the myriad benefits that are so well documented, understood and felt. At the same time, it purposefully sets out a view on competence when combining mental health and well-being interventions with outdoor learning.

A significant goal of this Statement has also been to develop a model that supports organisations and individuals who provide and utilise services for mental health and well-being in an outdoor setting. The statement has been strongly informed by mapping current practice, specifically in the UK. It has been created to ensure that those engaging outdoor services and practitioners to improve mental health and well-being can do so with better understanding, confidence and trust in what they are offered and how it is implemented.

To compliment the IOL Statement, the newly launched 'Sustainability Indicators When Utilising Nature for Mental Health' report is an output of one of the (UKRI) MARCH network funded research projects. The research was co-led by Dr James Fullam (University of Exeter) and Dr Kaye Richards (Liverpool John Moores University). It brought together partners from across a range of practice and research to focus on the swiftly evolving landscape of using the outdoors for targeted mental health benefit and interventions, as previously described. This project represented a unique and timely effort focussed on collating and exploring sustainability-related concerns with service users and stakeholders in this burgeoning sector.

Of course, these growth conditions bring with them both opportunities and concerns. This report, by way of response, offers organisations a way to consider and best position themselves to offer ethical and effective delivery of services for long term benefit to beneficiaries, commissioners and wider community stakeholders alike. A key outcome of the project, The 'Six P' Sustainability Framework, provides a structure from which a practical set of sustainability indicators have been derived and collated into a self-assessment tool. The range of associated indicators offered in the tool can be used to review and self-assess sustainability across key domains related to the delivery of outdoor mental health interventions.

The presentation will offer a call to action. The authors of the documents detailed above invite the audience and their wider networks to promote and consider the adoption, of both the Statement of Good Practice and the Sustainability Indicators in their professional context. Utilising these frameworks for strategic and systemic decision making and developing reflexive capacity and processes in practice will, we believe, lead to a robust, credible and effective community of practice. In this vein, and as a strong indicator of commitment to developing the future cohesion and coherence of the sector, the presentation will conclude by introducing the newly constituted UK & Ireland Association for Outdoor therapy (AOT). The AOT intends to become a diverse community of practice, representative of the full spectrum of skills, knowledge and experience practitioners bring from all zones within the OMHI model.

The stated mission of the Association is to promote safe, ethical and sustainable approaches to outdoor therapy by building a thriving community of practice, promoting knowledge and understanding, and building capability in the field. The intention is for this to become the professional home of those involved in outdoor mental health interventions and outdoor therapy in the UK and Ireland. At this time, we invite those interested in membership of the Association to express interest and all who share this vision are welcome. We invite all interested parties to remain connected and involved with the Association as it develops in earnest.

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WATER - BLUE SPACE PRESENTATION

Sailing as a Therapeutic Platform for Personal, Social, and Community Development

Tessa Kingston - Sailing into Wellness



About the author - A Professional Journey

Tessa grew up in and around the sea and having become a sailing instructor at an early age, she saw the positive impact that outdoor activity had on her own mental health and wellbeing. Inspired by this, she pursued an undergraduate degree in Psychology and Sociology while expanding her outdoor experience across a range of disciplines (climbing, surfing, kayaking, hiking).

While continuing to work in outdoor education, Tessa gained experience of therapeutic programs by volunteering and working in Ireland and abroad for programs such as Surf2Heal, Active Connections and Camp Akeela. When Sailing into Wellness ran their first pilot, Tessa joined them as soon as possible and has been with them ever since.

Realizing she needed more in her therapeutic toolbox to further her capacity to engage in this area of work, Tessa pursued her Masters in Counselling and Psychotherapy. During this time she completed research in profiling the outdoor-based therapeutic services in Ireland. This encouraged the collaboration that has led to the formation of the 'Outdoor Therapeutic Activity Providers' network. *"We all work differently and what we offer varies greatly, but we have one thing in common; we venture outdoors with a therapeutic intent. The idea is that each organisation is celebrated for its unique work, and the hope is that we can make these programs more recognised and available to people who need them"*.

Sailing into Wellness

Sailing into Wellness (SIW) is a not-for-profit charity and social enterprise providing therapeutic programs based on the sea. SIW aims to aid participants in managing their physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. Through sailing, participants experience new ways of interacting with themselves, others, and their environment. SIW programs aim to empower individuals to build a positive sense of selves and sense of community.

SIW began in the addiction recovery sphere and has quickly grown to encompass more areas of need. SIW now caters for a range of populations nationwide. Programs are tailored to meet the needs and goals of the engaging groups. Support groups catered for to date include addiction recovery, mental health, criminal justice system, homeless, NEETs, youth at risk, people with intellectual disabilities, non-nationals and refugees, the travelling community, LGBT+, post psychiatric care and marginalized communities. Sailing into Wellness offers three core programmes.

1) The Foundation Programme

Completed on small keelboats across 4 consecutive weeks. Groups of 8 come with a group leader and journey with 2 SIW Instructors.

This experiential program focuses on core life skills, meeting participants where they are at and offering opportunities for people to work on personal goals. Social skills and overcoming personal barriers are the main areas of focus.



2) Voyage of Recovery

Live-a-board residential voyages on the 'Ilen', a 56ft wooden sailing vessel. Typically 3 days and 2 nights.

This experiential program builds on skills learnt in the foundation program. Increasing the challenge and opportunity for participants to make personal changes in a dynamic but safe environment.



1) The Progression Programme

This is a pathway program offered to participants who show a keen interest in the practical and theoretical aspects of sailing and powerboating. SIW brings participants through the certification of National Powerboat, Start Sailing (level 1), and Competent Crew qualifications awarded under Irish Sailing NGB. This is an educational opportunity leading to independent employment and volunteering opportunity for participants.

SIW is a mobile service and has operated out of 9 locations nationwide, with primary locations in; Cork, Dublin, Waterford and Limerick.

Therapeutic Underpinning

Sailing into Wellness (SIW) is a trauma informed practice. Staff and volunteers go through 'Trauma Informed Care' training, as well as a range of other relevant cpds (autism awareness, suicide prevention, mindfulness coaching and in-house training). This enables them to have a broader understanding and ability to work with the range of groups.

CRA 'Community Reinforcement Approach' has been incorporated into SIW programs. A therapeutic approach used in the addiction recovery field based around co-journeying with a participant in achievable goal setting, pro-social behaviours, taking responsibility and positive reinforcement. This combined with a strengths-based approach contributes to participant empowerment over their life and choices.

Summary of the Presentation

Services Overview - Quantitative Data

- SIW is in operation since 2017
- 2022 statistics: 470 participants from 40 different organisations. 9 locations across Ireland. 1465 participation days. 210 days on the water
- Increases in participants according to their self-report scales.

Foundation Program participants score high in:

- Dealing with stressful situations
- Decision Making
- Communication
- General happiness
- Ability to learn
- Relations with group members
- Taking responsibility

Voyage participants scored high in:

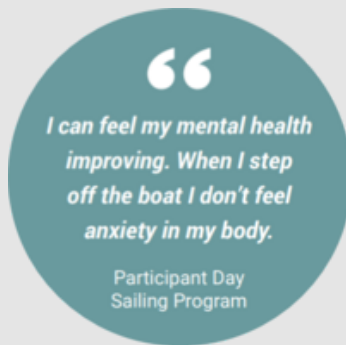
- Working as part of a team
- Dealing with stressful situations
- Communication
- General happiness
- Taking instruction



Outcomes - Qualitative Data

Thematic analysis of participant feedback

- 1) Headspace
"You just leave all your problems behind on shore. You actually get a break!"
- 2) Belief in Self
"I never thought I'd be able to do something like this"
- 3) New perspectives
"I'm not the same person when I set back into my everyday, I can approach things differently after sailing"
- 4) Overcoming fears
"I have huge social anxiety and a massive fear of water. I can't believe I liked this and want more!"
- 5) Social Support/Working as Part of a Team
"we need each other out here. They have my back. I haven't felt that kind of support in years"
- 6) Fun/Enjoyment
"the past few years have been misery, I forgot what it was like to laugh. We've had such a laugh!"



Therapeutic Underpinning

Thematic analysis of support worker feedback

1) Improvement in attendance and engagement

"Our guys have such a chaotic life right now, we never get full attendance, but they always show up for the sailing!"

2) Increased motivation

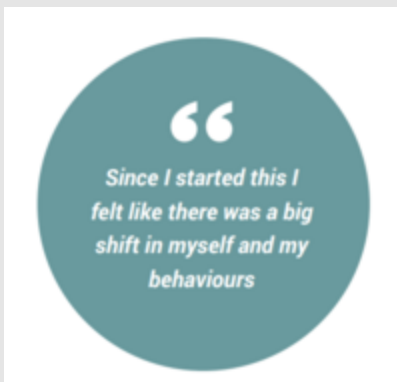
"taking part in the sailing has given these guys some core skills in self-organization and pursuing a goal. I have a few going on to do their progression program and a few who are signing up to PLCs now. They are so excited. These education opportunities seemed inaccessible to them before"

3) Enjoyment and fun

"My group have so much going on right now, it's great to see them actually enjoying life. That spark lasts the rest of the week and gives them strength to carry on doing the hard work"

4) Relaxation and peace

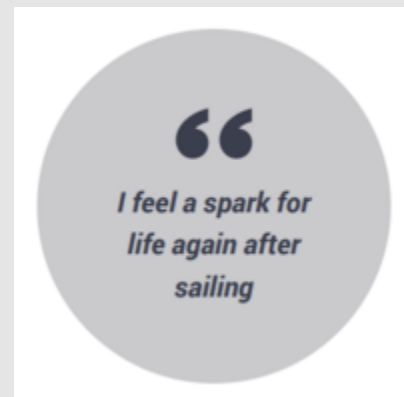
"Something about the boat allows them to genuinely relax. We see a different version of them. They are actually regulated, and it makes a huge difference"



Conclusion

Overall, data shows that using sailing as a key activity benefits participants through 4 key areas:

- 1) Personal development: building confidence, resilience, decision making, overcoming fears and practicing new coping mechanisms.
- 2) Social/Community Development: engaging in teamwork, leadership, positive communication, prosocial activity, trust building and inclusion. A sense of social support.
- 3) Physical Wellness: engaging in physical activity and experiencing physical regulation from the natural environment.
- 4) Education: experiential learning, certification, future study, and employment opportunities.



WATER - BLUE SPACE PRESENTATION

The Biopsychosocial Model of Mental Health



Jasmin Stallard, Director & Project Lead,
New Wave Wild Project CLGs



About the author - A Professional Journey

My background is in education, focused mainly on adult services. After a BA in English & Philosophy I studied for a PGDip in Adult & Community Education and an M.Ed specialising in Aggression Studies. I co-founded New Wave Adventure Therapy Ltd (2017) and New Wave Wild Project CLG (2019), initially running the services behind the scenes. However, I returned to education in 2019 to study for a M.Sc. in Applied Psychology, PG Cert in REBT, and an M.A. Integrative Counselling & Psychotherapy, and I am delighted to be working directly with young people, adults, and small groups on several of our Wild Projects.

Mental health is a continuum

Humans are individually, and collectively, complex. Instinctively, we respond to all kinds of stimuli that we perceive to threaten our survival and wellbeing. A familiar structure to illustrate this comes in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, shown below. This model depicts how humans can achieve fulfilment (self-actualisation) by ensuring that each of our needs is met, beginning with the lowest level, food, shelter, warmth etc. Once the lower level of needs are met we can look to fulfil the next level and so on. While a bottom-up approach is pragmatic, the complexity of human socio-emotional and external factors suggests that a more nuanced model of wellbeing might be applied.

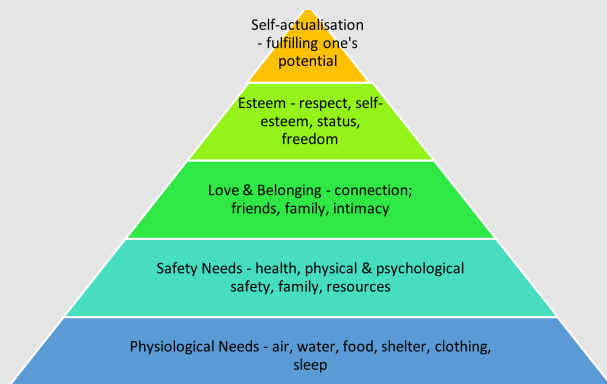


Fig 1. Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954)

Mental health is a continuum that is influenced by several factors, sometimes at once. The expression of a state of mental health can vary, and as practitioners working with individuals and groups towards responsive mental health care, our awareness of the factors that influence mental health supports our understanding of the individual experience, and ways that we can provide support.

The Biopsychosocial (BPS) Model of Mental Health

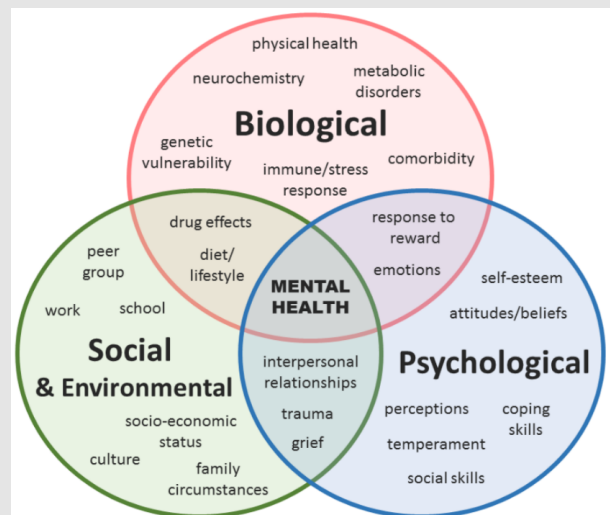


Fig 2. BPS Model

The biopsychosocial (BPS) model of mental health is presented as a holistic description of biological, psychological, and social factors that interact to influence mental health and wellbeing.

Each domain of the model contains multiple factors, see Fig. 2, and as complex beings, it is easy to see how factors can co-exist and amplify one another.

Often, a person presents for therapy expressing concern around one main issue. Good therapy seeks to capture a holistic impression of the world through the lens of the client, towards supporting them with relevant, purposeful, and effective therapeutic intervention strategies. The biopsychosocial model is a multi-systems lens for the effective therapist. It provides a structure that ensures comprehensive assessment and an informed formulation of helpful therapeutic approaches that are tailored to the client and their needs.

As an outdoor therapist at New Wave Wild Project, much of my work is one-to-one with young people and adults. I deliver all my work outdoors, exploring green and blue-adjacent spaces, and getting creative with activities and experiences outdoors to help deliver the message of each session. A key part of my approach is to listen and gather as much information about each new client as possible.

A detailed referral form asks direct questions about how the person presents and their history, but an initial call or session gives me much more than any form could. In traditional therapy, we are taught to listen, and to observe not just what clients tell us but how they respond. Unsurprisingly, extended sessions outdoors, using purposeful activities and tasks provide a range of opportunities for us to talk to clients, and to observe them in a way that is fun and engaging.



The modality of adventure and outdoor therapy

Delivering sessions and programmes through the modality of adventure and outdoor therapy, I believe, supports the practitioner to learn about clients in a natural way, and this is especially true for young people who tend to avoid direct questions and 'talk therapy'.

The BPS model has also been incredibly useful to me in communicating psychoeducational pieces with young people, and with those who support them. The model is easily shown in visual terms and can be represented using materials and tools found outdoors. Each aspect is familiar to us in everyday terms, and we can extract and explain examples easily.

I might ask a client to look at the biological and social spaces; to consider how it feels to have a stomach-ache, and what it would be like to have it at school all day. They will talk about the physical sensations of pain and queasiness, with perhaps an anecdote thrown in. They will talk about how oblivious friends are, and about the rumour mill explains withdrawal. They may or may not refer to the psychological impact of this scenario such as; the ability to cope, emotional response, and poor self-esteem.

The BPS model helps to map out these scenarios, and to apply them to more complicated ones. It also helps me to impart psychoeducation pieces with clients, and sometimes to caregivers as well, to help them to understand and provide their own support.

Conclusion

The BPS model fits neatly within my practice and serves as a helpful template for me to use in assessment and programme design as a psychotherapist.

As an outdoor practitioner the effect of time spent in nature can be transformative, and by leaning into these experiences and creating purposeful activities, the benefits can be seen in multiple domains.

WATER - BLUE SPACE PRESENTATION

Liquid Therapy Erasmus Project INCLUSEA Adaption & best practice toolkits



Tom Losey, CEO and Founder

About the author - A Professional Journey

The charity was founded in 2011 by its CEO Tom Losey. Tom started his journey into inclusive surfing in 2007 when he worked with the Californian foundation 'Surfers Healing'. Upon returning to Ireland in 2008 he saw the need to provide the same opportunities to local families and community groups and so the idea of Liquid Therapy was born.

Liquid Therapy - Award Winning Charity

Liquid Therapy is a multi-award winning charity with its base in South Donegal, Ireland. They provide a supported environment that enables young people to experience the physical and therapeutic benefits of the surf and ocean, through child centred and individually tailored programs.

Its mission is to facilitate the mental health and wellbeing benefits of the outdoors, and Blue Space in particular and ensure they are available to all – regardless of any existing barriers – intellectual, physical, behavioural or emotional.



The Project: INCLUSEA



From 2021 to 2023 they have been apart INCLUSEA an Erasmus+ project.

This project seeks to foster and promote greater inclusion and accessibility for people with physical and/or sensory disabilities in surfing in Europe. Through a highly participatory and interdisciplinary process.

INCLUSEA aims to evaluate, develop and co-create best practice guidance for a common teaching methodology for surfing instructors oriented to people with physical and/or sensory disabilities. This will help establish a common European and international standard for those who lead adapted surfing teaching or surf therapy programs.

The Impact

The findings of this project have helped Liquid Therapy develop its framework and understanding of how to build successful and high impact programmes.

This success has led Liquid Therapys programmes to become available for prescription through the HSE across the Northwest and to start working deeper in the Education and Sport sector with partner projects with Sport Ireland and Rethink.

Find out more

Website: www.liquidtherapy.ie

Instagram: [liquid.therapy](https://www.instagram.com/liquid.therapy) **Facebook:** Liquid Therapy

WATER - BLUE SPACE PRESENTATION

Surf2Heal: An investigation into the impact of outdoor therapy on the social behaviours of those with Autism Spectrum Disorder



Dr. Sorcha Ní Bhrudair

About the author - A Personal Journey

Researcher and presenter Sorcha Ni Bhrudair is currently working as a junior doctor in CUH, Cork. As a medical student she worked as a surf instructor on Garretstown Beach, Co. Cork, where she discovered Surf2Heal. She began volunteering as a surf instructor gradually increased her contribution by helping to develop and execute the 'Advanced Sessions', where experienced surfers progress from the main camp to taking part in traditional surf lessons.

Sorcha adds; *"It is difficult to fully articulate the impact Surf2Heal has had on my life - which should act to demonstrates how difficult it is to outline the incredible effects it has on its surfers. From my very first day as a volunteer, I knew it was an organisation I wanted to contribute to and help grow for years to come"*.

As a medical student Sorcha chose to combine her two passions when carrying out her research project - Medicine and Blue Space. *"I had seen firsthand the incredibly positive effects Surf2Heal had on its participants and was keen to try and document this in a formal and manner"*. Many parents of those who have participated in Surf2Heal advocate for its wider adoption, with many claiming it to have compellingly positive impacts on their children's social behaviours. It is frequently referred to as *'life changing'*. Inspired by such feedback, Sorcha's study sought to examine the extent to which this impact exists. These testimonies served as the inspiration for this study, to examine whether the data would line up with such promising anecdotal evidence.

"When I first set out, I had no idea how impactful the findings would be, and it is therefore a privilege for me to be able spread these findings in the hope they will contribute further to the development and growth of such phenomenal organisations"

Dr. Sorcha Ní Bhrudair, 2023

What is Surf2Heal?

Surf2Heal is Ireland's first surf camp for people on the Autism Spectrum. It is a surf camp designed and tailored specifically for those with ASD. It is a voluntary organisation based in Cork, first established in 2008. The camp was set up after a mother noticed the profoundly positive effect the ocean had on her son with ASD. Teaming up with the local surf school, they began a program to make the positive impacts of the sea accessible to more people with ASD.

Surf2Heal offers children with ASD a space in which they can have a social and sensory experiences, in an environment designed to put them at ease. They are given the freedom to connect with themselves, others and nature in whatever way feels right to them.

Surf2Heal is a therapeutic program by nature. It is lead by a core team of specialists (qualified special needs care assistant, psychologist, psychotherapist, outdoor instructors, Occupational Therapists, SNA's and parents) and run by a broad team of trained and passionate volunteers.

Surf2Heal takes a child-centred, experiential, and strengths-based approach. This allows the program to be lead by the needs and preferences of the surfer. Surf2Heal caters for a wide range of abilities and remains highly in demand each year.



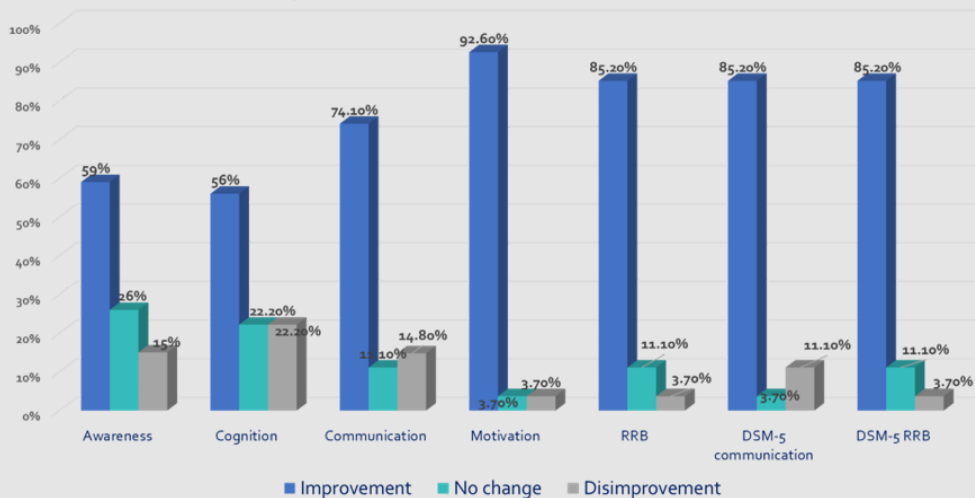
Summary of Presentation: Research completed as a Medical Student

This cohort study was carried out with the aim of comparing the social behaviours of those with ASD before and after participating in a surf camp tailored specifically towards those with ASD. The parents of those who participated in Surf2Heal filled out two copies of the Social Responsiveness Scale-2 questionnaire [SRS-2]. The first was based on participants behaviour prior to the camp, and the second based on participants behaviour following the camp. This study was granted ethical approval by the Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) of University College Cork in April 2020. A total of 27 participants who attended Surf2Heal camps in 2020/2021 took part in this study. They ranged in age from of 8 to 24 years old, with a mean age of 14.3 years.

Results were compared using paired t-tests to ascertain if there was an impact on social behaviours, examining overall impact and seven treatment subscales. The variables examined were Social Awareness, Cognition, Communication, Motivation, and Restricted Interests and Repetitive Behaviours. When examining the difference in results, paired t-tests were conducted to assess statistical significance. Statistical significance was designated at the level of $p < 0.01$. Improvements were seen in Total Score, and in all seven treatment subscales examined.

Discussion: Results showed overall positive impact of Surf2Heal on Social Responsiveness in participants with ASD. Speculated explanations include; nature connection, multisensory, highly stimulating environment, and internal mechanisms similar to stereotypical behaviour.

Change seen after Surf2Heal intervention



Discussion

Results showed overall positive impact of Surf2Heal on Social Responsiveness in participants with ASD. Speculated explanations include; nature connection, multisensory, highly stimulating environment, and internal mechanisms similar to stereotypical behaviour.



This study establishes multiple key areas which would benefit from future research. Firstly, a comprehensive assessment of the longevity of positive results, as seen in this study, would offer further guidance to future implementation of surf interventions.

Scope for future studies exists in examining whether increasing the length of camp, or more intense versions of a surf intervention may demonstrate greater improvements in social functioning among a population with ASD. Investment in further research is needed to understand the general significance of blue-space for public health and the potential for embedding blue-space within existing health promotion services.

Conclusion

ASD is a complex, multifaceted condition. While no cure exists, it is paramount that healthcare professionals provide the best possible management plans to aid those living with the condition. Results of this study show that camps such as those examined can markedly reduce the burden and impact of challenging social behaviours seen in ASD. There is growing interest in promoting blue space and this study is a step towards understanding the benefits of blue-space activities, in particular surfing, have on those with ASD.

WATER - BLUE SPACE PRESENTATION

Meitheal Mara and its Bádóireacht Youth Programme



Clare Hayden, Youth programme Manager, at Bádóireacht

The Foundation of Meitheal Mara

Meitheal Mara roughly translates as Community of the Sea. The organisation was established in 1993. It was borne from the recognition that the currach, the traditional Irish boat, was in danger of being lost from our culture. The organisation was formed in Cork City and initially received funding to deliver FÁS courses, training people to build currachs. However the founders of the organisation were determined that these newly-built boats would not be made just to become museum pieces. They wanted to see these boats actively being used. They also were keenly aware of how under-utilised the rivers and the sea are as a resource. The centre of Cork City is an island meaning that its residents are never far from the water. Yet boats had gradually disappeared from the channels of the river, as fishing became less commercially viable for fishermen in small craft, and there were now limited opportunities to access water activities in the city.

Meitheal Mara then was established with a number of core values and aims:

- To promote and preserve the heritage of the Irish currach
- To provide training and personal development opportunities in a supportive, inclusive and mutually respectful environment
- To provide access to the water and water activities for those that would not otherwise have the opportunities to access this amenity
- To celebrate and promote Ireland's rich maritime heritage

The Bádóireacht Youth Programme

The Bádóireacht youth programme, first initiated in 2002, has become a core element of Meitheal Mara in the intervening twenty-one years. Over this time Bádóireacht has engaged with thousands of young people. While Bádóireacht was founded initially with the aim of providing access to the water, the programme has evolved to become much more than that.

Bádóireacht works with young people aged from thirteen to twenty-four years of age. Core funding for Bádóireacht is provided by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth. This funding enables Bádóireacht to work with youth organisations such as Foróige, YMCA, Youthreach and Tusla. The programme engages with up to two hundred young people every year.

Bádóireacht works with a diversity of young people. Many of the young people are experiencing economic, social and cultural disadvantages and are vulnerable to marginalisation or isolation. Young people may be growing up in households that are experiencing intergenerational unemployment, poverty, neurodiversity, drug and alcohol misuse, discrimination, mental health stigma, a strong influence of cultural expectations, low levels of literacy/educational attainment and/or lack of role models in the community.

Some of the young people are from marginalised and vulnerable communities such as migrants, those living in Direct Provision accommodation, members of the travelling community, the LGBTI community and those experiencing neurodiversity. In 2018 Bádóireacht was awarded an EU Sports Award in recognition of its work in sports inclusion.



Why the Currach?

Bádóireacht, which means boating in Irish, is Meitheal Mara's youth programme. Young people are introduced to rowing using the 16 foot Dunfanaghy style currach. The currach is an incredibly light boat.

The Dunfanaghys that are used by Bádóireacht are built in the Meitheal Mara boatyard. They are built by community groups that attend Meitheal Mara over twelve to sixteen weeks. Meitheal Mara works with a huge variety of community groups in building these boats, such as: people in recovery from addiction, people with mental health difficulties, people with acquired brain injuries, people that have come through the prison service, migrant groups, people that are experiencing social anxiety or social isolation. Once the boat is completed by the community group a celebratory boat launch is held on the River Lee and all those involved in building the boat as well as their family and friends have the opportunity to row the boat. So the Meitheal Mara Dunfanaghy is built by the community, for the community.

The Bádóireacht Youth Programme

Bádóireacht as a Meitheal (a community) has been influenced by the feedback and the desires of the youth participants. Many of them want to progress and to continue to be challenged in their rowing.

In response to this, the **Bádóireacht Summer Camp** was established. Each August, over four days, young people will progress from rowing Dunfanaghy currachs to rowing larger and more technically difficult currachs. By the end of the Summer Camp the participants will have enough knowledge and experience that they can proceed to becoming members of Naomhóga Chorcaí currach club as a fully participatory and contributing member of the club.

The **Bádóireacht Council** was established in 2019. This council of youth participants was established to ensure that the voices of the youth participants was being heard within the Bádóireacht programme. In response to feedback from the Bádóireacht Council, in 2022, the Youth Leadership Programme was initiated. This programme ran very successfully in 2022 and was delivered again in 2023 to a new cohort of young people. Bádóireacht now has a team of Youth Leadership Programme ‘graduates’ that are very capable trainers. Not only that but often young people attending Bádóireacht for the first time can find themselves identifying with these young trainers that may come from the same parts of the city and from similar backgrounds to themselves.

Other progression includes:

- Fionnbarra Bantry Longboat:
- Joining ‘sliding seat’ rowing clubs
- Multi-day sailing voyages with Sail Training Ireland
- Go Adventure Course: Twenty-week personal development programme with Kinsale Outdoor Education Centre.
- Two Bádóireacht graduates have gone on to work in Meitheal Mara
- Kinsale College: Progression on to The Outdoor Adventure Education Course in Kinsale College



The Importance of Volunteers

Meitheal Mara is a small organisation with five full-time and fifteen part-time staff. The Bádóireacht programme has a full-time manager and a part-time assistant manager. The work would not be possible without the support and contribution of a large team of volunteers. This team of approximately fifty volunteers is made up largely of members of Naomhóga Chorcaí with a growing number of Bádóireacht graduates also swelling the numbers. The Bádóireacht volunteers are as diverse as the people in every other aspect of Meitheal Mara. The diversity of the volunteers presents a strong message for the youth participants: while some people are stronger, some people are fitter, some people are more experienced - everyone has a value and a contribution to make in their own way.



What Bádóireacht provides for its participants

- Bádóireacht fosters and encourages teamwork and communication in young people
- Currachs are light boats. People do not need to be strong or to row them making Currach rowing an inclusive sport.
- Currach rowing is a simple repetitive activity making the activity accessible to people with cognitive difficulties or conditions such as dyspraxia.
- The repetitive nature of the stroke can have a calming and meditative
- Rowing can be a useful way to get away from societal stimuli and gives young people a completely new and different experience
- Being in a boat, at a remove from everything else, gives participants a sense of space.
- The activity of rowing the currach can give young people a feeling of control and success.
- Rowers are encouraged to take on roles of responsibility and grow in self-confidence as a result.
- Bádóireacht work with participants to set new goals and challenges and supports them with these challenges.
- Participants are taught that it is ok to fail.
- Young people build resilience through participation in the Bádóireacht programme.
- Young people that have felt marginalised and isolated can feel like they are part of a larger community of currach rowers
- More experienced young people are encouraged to volunteer to become more engaged in their local community
- Young people mix with people that they might never otherwise encounter.
- Participants can explore Cork City’s river channels by boat
- Young people make a connection to Ireland’s maritime heritage
- Participants can learn about the tide, currents and weather conditions

“

The main attraction for me is the privacy aspect of being on the water. You’re kind of secluded and have all sorts of chats with people, it never leaves the boat. It’s the ‘bubble’ of the boat.

Bádóireacht graduate & volunteer

”

“

The most thing I get [from rowing] is relief because being in 5th year things can get very stressful over time and build up and I’m not the type of person who will express myself much to guardians. So I let everything in my mind clog up completely and these opportunities give me the chance to, similar to meditating, the opportunity to drop everything, drop all the worries.

Youth Leadership Programme participant, aged 16

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WOODLANDS - GREEN SPACE PRESENTATION

Nature connection and well-being



Jenny Beale, Founder & Director of Brigit's Garden

About the author - My dream

We live in a world where many people's lives are increasingly detached from the natural world. My dream for Brigit's Garden was to create a place where people of all ages could connect with nature in beautiful surroundings and find inspiration, delight, tranquillity and learning as they do so.

Our Site

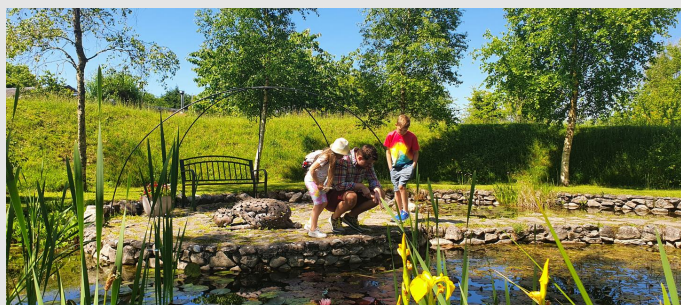
On our 11-acre site in Co. Galway we have Celtic-themed gardens surrounded by natural habitats, allowing nature connection in many forms. It has been a constant delight to see the many ways this has evolved over the years: children running free in the meadows, making magic potions out of herbs on a school tour or getting creative at a forest school session; adults sitting on a bench absorbed in wildflowers, watching dragonflies zooming around the pond, or participating in a forest bathing walk.



Nature Connection

What do we mean by nature connection? Connection implies relationship. For example, when we connect with family members or friends we build relationship, we get to know each other better, we feel empathy and develop understanding. The same can hold true as we build a relationship with the natural world around us, and the benefits are complex and important, both for us and for nature.

There is a growing mountain of literature about the health benefits of nature connection. Studies around the world have shown that being in green or blue natural environments reduces stress hormones and blood pressure, improves our ability to concentrate, creates feelings of well-being and mitigates loneliness. It can measurably help symptoms of depression and anxiety, and even lower the risk of diabetes and heart disease.



Trusting our Instincts

The science is very useful at times, but of course we don't need researchers to tell us that we feel better outdoors in the natural world. We *know* this, we know it with our deepest selves, with the old, animal parts of our minds, with our souls. It is important, I believe, to trust our instincts and our experiences.

City-based, largely indoor living is a very recent oddity in the long story of our species. Perhaps we should look at the issue the other way round – if we understand that most people now live un-natural lives, then we can see that the serious disconnect from nature that this implies is a factor in many of the physical and mental health issues that trouble us today.

Nature connection is also vital for the wider planet. People who have little or no relationship with nature are less likely to care about environmental destruction or the worrying decline in wildlife. You have to know and love something to want to protect it and fight for it. The more we learn about the species around us the more we care. And nature needs every one of us to stand up and say that we do care, that the environment matters; and to believe that we will all benefit from restoring the natural world and welcoming wildlife back, locally and globally.

Everyone at this conference is involved in outdoor activities in some form, so it may be useful to recognise that whatever activities you offer, they probably contain elements of nature connection, and that this undoubtedly adds significantly to their therapeutic value. It might be the moment when a kid in a kayak stops paddling and is absorbed in the play of sunlight on water, or an adult struggling up a hill pauses to take in a stunning view. It could be a group sitting round a campfire watching the smoke rise into the night sky, or someone feeling delighted that they can recognise a hazel tree and distinguish it from an oak.

At Brigit's Garden, we offer a variety of habitats that allow people of all ages to experience time in natural surroundings and enjoy connecting with nature, with opportunities for learning too - on a school tour or a guided walk, or by training as a forest school leader. But it is nature itself in all its variety that works the true magic, if we are open to it. And it is up to us to support nature in return.

WOODLANDS - GREEN SPACE PRESENTATION

Physical and Psychological Safety in Blue and Green Spaces

Philip Stallard, Director & Adventure Therapist
New Wave Wild Project CLG



About the author - A Professional Journey

I returned to education as a mature student to study for a B.A. in Adventure Tourism Management in IT Tralee (MTU). During this time I began to work in a Special Care Unit, a residential service for young people under high court order. The difference that being in open blue and green spaces with the young people was incredible.

I could see that outdoor activities were engaging, calming, and restorative for the young people, and it inspired me to look into adventure therapy as a career. I completed a Master of Business, by research and continued with research into aspects of adventure therapy practice. I learned about the Association of Experiential Education in the US and decided to build on my outdoor instructorships and adventure training by pursuing professional training to fulfil the requirements. I trained as a Social Worker at UCC and co-founded New Wave Adventure Therapy.

I wanted therapy to be delivered in a way that those young people in Special Care could engage with; trauma-informed, strengths-based, and with an emphasis on safety and trust in the therapist. I achieved my CCAT license with the AEE in 2019 and have continued to develop my practice with each year. Realising the need to provide a more clinical therapy offering, I have trained in REBT (CBT) and am a fully accredited Psychotherapist.

Over the course of my postgraduate trainings, I have completed four dissertations around aspects of adventure therapy practice;

B.A. Adventure Tourism Management "The Use of Adventure Therapy for At-Risk Teens"

M.Bus. "Suspicion to Co-opetition; enhancing the Irish Adventure Tourism Network through Innovation"

M.S.W. "Using Adventure Therapy as an Intervention in the Context of Mental Health Recovery in a Structured Social Work Setting"

M.A. Counselling & Psychotherapy "Think outside: A Qualitative Study of Adventure Therapy from the Perspective of the Adventure Therapist; a Grounded Theory Approach"



The Point of difference in effective therapy

Over several years practicing as an adventure therapist, I have reflected often on what factors in my own practice and observed in others', have been the point of difference, or 'mechanism of change', in effective therapy outcomes for clients.

Adventurous activities are purposefully prescribed in adventure programming to bring about observable reactions and responses from the client (Weston et al., 1999; Russell and Phillips-Miller, 2002; Ewert and Garvey, 2007). These in turn may be analysed, reflected upon, and altered to support the client in their therapeutic objectives.

Through a piece of grounded theory research in 2022, I interviewed 9 adventure therapists from 7 different countries about their practices and the mechanism of change, and one of the strongest themes that emerged was around safety; physical safety in the outdoors, and psychological safety in the therapy space.

The relationship between client and therapist, the therapeutic alliance (Bordin, 1979; Horvath, 2001) has been shown to be the strongest predictor of successful therapeutic outcomes across a range of psychotherapeutic models and approaches and client populations (Horvath & Symonds, 1991; Martin et al., 2000). Nature-based interventions have been shown to provide additional opportunities to establish and strengthen the therapeutic relationship between therapist and client, and opportunities too for indirect therapeutic work through creative means, including metaphor work.



External and Internal Trust

Those who engage with therapy may present with any sort of distress arising from all kinds of experiences and contexts. Adventure therapy is usually offered as an alternative to traditional clinic-based therapy, and in my experience tends to be offered as a creative alternative for those with complex presentations. Hill (2007) asserted that youth at-risk tend to develop external trust, in the physical sphere, before opening up feeling a sense of trust internally, in the emotional and psychological spheres.

Adventure therapy practice deliberately works to support a good therapeutic alliance between the therapist and client, and this is laid out through a programme of work building up the client's experience and understanding of safety beginning with a basic conceptualisation of physical safety in the space.

Keeping the Space Safe

The environment and adventure activities planned for sessions must come as second nature to the effective practitioner; they must be proficient in managing the space to instill a sense of safety in the client. I find myself reiterating the importance of a solid base with my clients in terms of developing new skills and engaging with therapeutic change.

When faced with unpacking trauma, clients must be supported to consider the therapeutic space as a reliable and safe space. They must also see that the therapist is skilled and competent to keep the space psychologically safe; over time they learn about what safety means in this new domain. It is at this point, where safety in the space is truly understood by the client, that the mechanism of change begins.



Lasmuigh Podcast

The Lasmuigh Podcast has been created to sit alongside the journal in highlighting and sharing research and good practice across the Island of Ireland. Three Podcasts have been created.

1. Interview with Dr Suzanne Kennedy regarding her research on sea kayaking expeditions and connection to the other than human world.
2. Group discussion with members of the new Outdoor Therapeutic Activity Providers Network.
3. From Entrancement to Enchantment. Discussion with Dr Mark Garavan starting as a discussion of education for sustainability and ending up with something much wider.



MOUNTAIN & WILDERNESS SPACE PRESENTATION



Mountain and Wilderness Space for Learning and Education at Comeragh Wilderness Academy

Quentin Weaver, Principal, Comeragh Wilderness Academy

About the author - A Professional Journey

Quentin is an American who grew up enjoying learning in the outdoors of Texas. An opportunity to volunteer as a junior cert level tutor brought him to Ireland, where he has now spent a total of eleven years working with young people. He has been with Comeragh Wilderness Camp for nine years, working in multiple roles including group teacher, groupwork supervisor, family support liaison, and his current role of principal. Quentin has completed a level seven in social care at WIT and is enthusiastic about using the outdoors as a venue for caring education.

Our organisation, Comeragh Wilderness Academy

Our organisation, Comeragh Wilderness Academy, provides an alternative education programme for young people who are having difficulty in the conventional educational environment. We offer an outdoor residential academy where students live in the forest as a group, learn to resolve problems as they arise in daily life, and experience student-led life wide learning. Our goal is to provide these young people, along with their families, the tools and support necessary to transition back into their communities.

Comeragh Wilderness Academy is based on Wilderness Road Therapeutic Camping (WRTC), a model developed in the USA by Mr. Campbell Loughmiller in the 1940s. The model is based in L.B. Sharp's experiential outdoor education theories. By the 1970s, WRTC was widely operational in the USA, where it has had amazing success in helping young people in difficulty. Follow-up research has demonstrated that most children who undertake WRTC programmes can successfully reintegrate back into their family and academic settings at or above the grade level of their peers.

The academy is currently open to enrolment for boys ages 11-15 and is registered with TUSLA as an independent school. We are a charitable organisation that relies on donations and the work of volunteers, allowing the academy to be accessible to anyone who is interested in enrolment.



Our Curriculum

Our curriculum is not set or pre-defined, but is led by the needs of young people who attend our service. Our classroom for education is the outdoors and reaches beyond the limits of our 46 acres. The residential and experiential aspects of the camp program allow students the flexibility of learning natural science, local and state history, reading, composition, mathematics, health, physical education, environmental science, and home economics as they live daily life.

Most of these subjects are taught in 5-6 week units allowing the group to invest a great deal of time and energy on specific chosen content area. Whether on our campus or beyond, searching for fossils at the sea, canoeing on a river, hiking in the mountains, visiting historical sites, or touring places of interest, our staff are always guiding students to maximise learning opportunities. Resources are available to young people who wish to follow national curriculum and individual tutoring is available in English & Maths. We work with students to develop an academic plan and set goals on how to achieve the studying of the subject.

Students live in the forest in a type of village of lodge styled tents built by the group using hand tools. Just like home, they too have a porch area, sitting room, toilets, cooking facilities, and sleeping rooms in a circle figure with the entrance of the campsite to the front. Each day follows a **structured routine**. The students learn simple skills such as making their bed and cleaning their living site, teaching them to preserve and care for their natural surroundings as well as themselves.



Staff and students are expected to 'help themselves while helping others.' Our goal is to re-introduce students to what a **healthy relationship** is, how to respect one another, listen to one another, and to work together to solve problems that arise within the group in daily life. Staff assist students to follow the steps of **problem solving** through each problem. As a student learns to talk about painful problems in a constructive manner, guided by the staff, a cycle of relational turmoil and confusion is replaced by appropriate behaviour resulting in great personal progress on the part of the student.

Each student learns **planning** skills by developing long and short term goals. Long term goals may include ideas that the group is planning for the next several months, such as a multiple day canoe trip on the River Barrow or drafting a new tent design to be built in campsite. Each week the group plans and writes out a very specific set of plans based upon the group's needs for the coming week. These plans must coincide with the group's long term goals. As the young person participates in this planning process, he begins to understand that effective planning goes far beyond an impulsive idea or a "my way first" attitude. Instead, good planning is rooted in clear plans with specific targets and goals at the forefront.

Staff continuously lead the group in a spirit of **evaluation** enables the group to learn from what they did well or what they could do better the next time. Additionally, at the conclusion of each day the group evaluates the successes and struggles of the day to maximise all learning.

Education and social learning go hand in hand with emotional and mental well-being. The WRTC model has shown that a young person responds quicker to education when underlying issues of rejection, fear, or failure are addressed and a path towards successful outcomes is achieved. At the academy, the student learns to believe in themselves again, which empowers him in life and in education. From building wooden tents in which we sleep, to cooking over an open fire, our therapeutic community teaches young people to find solutions to personal and group problems.



MOUNTAIN & WILDERNESS SPACE PRESENTATION

Insights and challenges in running multi day personal development and therapeutic expeditions



Nick Lenane – Co-Founder of the Venture Wilderness Project

About the author - A Personal Journey

I have been designing and delivering a diverse range of therapeutic and outdoor developmental programmes within the social service in Ireland and across Europe for some 16 years now. I hold a BA (Honours) in Outdoor Education, an MA in Family Support, a Dip in Business Executive and Life Coaching and I am currently completing an MA in Psychotherapy and Counselling. I work part-time as a Youth Justice Worker for Foróige in Galway and I am the Co-Founder of the Venture Out Wilderness Project, leading out on our Two Wolves (cultivating healthy masculinity) programme.

Being dyslexic and suffering from chronic headaches throughout my childhood and adolescence, education from an early age was very challenging. This meant a greater deal of focus was put on my physical capabilities and as a result I was destined to become a carpenter and leave school.

A week before my apprenticeship was to begin I was handed a prospectus of the Outdoor Education course at GMIT Castlebar (now called ATU Mayo Campus) and instantly knew that a career in the Outdoors was what I was supposed to do. I worked very hard to complete my Leaving Cert but it was not until I came to GMIT Castlebar, that, for the first time, I felt something that I had thought was out of my reach, that is the capability to learn things. Previously I had once internalised a perspective as to being 'too slow' to learn. Learning that intelligence is not just words on a page, but it is how these words inform our ability to understand and help us develop socially, physically and mentally. The practical application of theory to practice and experiential learning is what sparked in me my true passion for developing and supporting others. I share this with you as I believe that it holds true for many of our participants on our wilderness expeditions.



What is Venture Out Wilderness Project

Venture Out Wilderness Project is a registered charity. We prescribe and deliver outdoor, nature based therapeutic programmes to people experiencing a range of diverse challenges in their lives.

Barry and I met in 2015 on a Masters Course in NUIG. We quickly identified that we had the same vision and Grá for the outdoors. Both of us came together with the same understanding that Ireland has not met the same heights as other countries with regard to the potential of the outdoors.

We believe that every participant has their own unique set of personal needs and desires and that the necessary strengths and skills to address and meet these needs lie within. Through our work, we place great trust in these inner qualities and design our programmes with the view to reinforcing and building upon them.



Reflecting on Practice

As outdoor practitioners we all know the benefits the outdoors can bring and I am privileged to have witnessed some truly amazing stories of change and personal growth. However, it is the journey of change which has always sparked my curiosity in trying to perfect my practice. What are the mechanisms, nuances and variables that manifest the ingredient of personal growth? In this process of reflective practice I have found myself hovering over a number of challenges or perhaps curious insights that creep into my practice..

Letting the Mountains Speak for Themselves

Firstly, a challenge I encounter is that I am often questioning my loyalty to a particular style and theoretical model of practice. Sticking with a certain developmental model often makes me question how do these models prepare us for the reality and complexities of our clients? How does the theory measure up when things don't go to plan? Here, I will discuss what training can prepare you for these moments and how an integrative approach to different models allows us to adapt to group dynamics and unpredictable situational changes. I will conclude with the soothing fact that sometimes it ok and often necessary to "Let the mountains speak for themselves" and how this approach sits in an outcome focused landscape..

The role of the Ego

Secondly, I will address the ego and how it can trump the client's needs, how our beliefs dictate the process of how we should encourage and guide change. While we may be triggered and defensive by referring to our ego we must remember that our ego is a very important tool. However, if unchecked, an unhealthy ego can make us overly sensitive to failure or overconfident in your abilities. It can drive us to succeed, but it can also harm the process of facilitating growth. Here we will check in with ourselves and discuss how to capture moments when our ego takes charge and slips into an unhealthy state.

The Critical Role of Aftercare

Lastly we will explore safe spaces and the importance of aftercare in brief interventions. One of the highlights and greatest areas mentioned in participant feedback from our expeditions is the connections and the positive experiences shared by the group. It is the safe space created by the group that makes them feel valued and accepted. They gain warmth and comfort from this support system which gives them new energy that lifts the fog of troubling circumstances. While this is amazing, we have to critically look at where that experience leaves the individual throughout the rest of their life course and what happens when the expedition ends and they return home. Here we look at the aftercare, an often overlooked and underfunded aspect of our work. We sometimes hear of clients regressing to old habits months after stating "this has changed my life". We will explore aftercare and the steps you can take to ensure greater outcomes for participants under restricted funding.

Conclusion

I conclude with drawing you back to the opening paragraph of my own story, as starting college was very much my own personal expedition. College was always something I was told, quite directly, I would not be able to accomplish. I had once internalised something about myself as true and when exposed to a community, a "safe space" that the outdoors provides, it helped me feel that I actually can be valued, that I have forms of intelligence, my confidence can grow and that I have something to offer people around me. It is this same process I see in our participants throughout our expeditions, their true selves emerge, social norms are broken and they often find themselves excelling in areas of their personality that they had once internalised as "I am not good at that". This is something I feel is unique that the outdoor brings to personal growth and has huge potential in our society.



MOUNTAIN & WILDERNESS SPACE PRESENTATION

An Evidence base for Outdoor Therapeutic Interventions

Ray Burke and Graham Burke

About the authors

Ray is the founder and CEO of Active Connections - Before starting Active Connections in 2012 Ray worked in the USA on Outward Bound and Wilderness Therapy Programming.

Graham is a former soldier with a host of experience in training and facilitation. Graham is currently finishing his masters in mentoring and psychology.

What is Active Connections CLG

Active Connections was founded by James Bruton, John Paul O'Neill and Raymond Burke in 2012 with the mission to "Transform Lives Through Adventure". The trio, who met whilst working in the residential care industry, were shocked by the number of young people falling through the cracks. They quickly identified that it was not the young people at fault, but the system.

Since inception, one of Active Connection's goals was to actively connect with like-minded people and organisations to spread the founders' genuine belief that the outdoors is a dynamic and powerful environment to enable people to overcome adversity.

They established Active Connections and focused on developing outdoor based therapeutic services that would reduce the size of the cracks in the social care system, by supplying more options and ensuring that fewer young people would be missed.

The New Trails service was rolled out in 2012 as an adventure based therapeutic service. Jim and John Paul moved to other opportunities in those early days. Ray became CEO and led the further development of the organisation. In 2015, Active Connections added an overnight adventure respite service called Breakaway, which sits under the umbrella of the New Trails service, but provides additional support to young people and their families/carers during times of particular pressures.

Active Connections became an award-winning social enterprise first in 2014 Social Entrepreneurs Ireland, 2019 and again in 2023 with Rethink Ireland.

In 2018 the Ember Camp programme was added to the suite of services supplied by Active Connections. This was the first step into the disability sector. The Ember Camp service now delivers 1/3 of the direct work carried out by Active Connections. 2022 saw the development of the 'Respond' out of hours service, a service which holds the principles of reducing the cracks in the system at its core



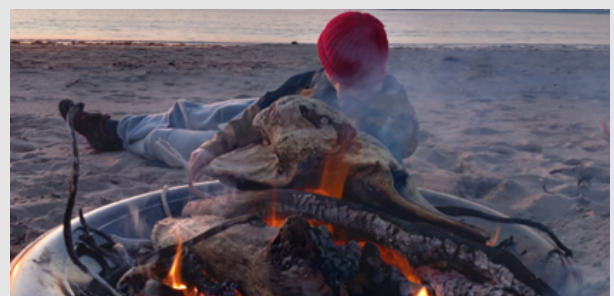
Our Presentation

Our presentation will focus on our outdoor therapeutic service 'New Trails' but will include an overview of our service offering and impact record. The primary research being presented will reflect a study we carried out following 18 months of research. The research used the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ) to gather data.

This presentation will go through the process of collecting that data, i.e., the who, what, why and hows. We will show the change participants experienced throughout the time of the intervention. We will also show the effect witnessed by the primary carers of the participants.

We will explore the six LEQ factors we measured and how these aligned to the referral requests for the case managers/social workers of the participants.

Our presentation will present three case studies of participants in an effort to show the consistent effect across participants coming from differing backgrounds/situations. All case studies will be anonymised.



MOUNTAIN & WILDERNESS SPACE PRESENTATION

Venture Trust - 'meeting the client where they're at' - Taking 1:1 therapy to people's local green and blue-spaces.

Avril Leonard - Outdoor Therapist



venturetrust

About the author - Personal Journey

I am an Outdoor Therapist for The Venture Trust Outdoor Therapy Service. When I went into training as a Person-Centred therapist, I had hoped a role like this would appear someday and luckily, shortly after qualifying, it did.

It was 15 years of experience working in a variety of education, outdoor and community settings with marginalised groups as an educator and facilitator that lead to me to training as a therapist. Though since studying Outdoor Education (BA Honors), at the start of my career, the therapeutic use of the outdoors had always been my passion.

The Venture Trust Outdoor Therapy Service

The Venture Trust Outdoor Therapy Service is part of the charity, Venture Trust. Venture Trust has provided personal development work in outdoor and community settings in Scotland since 1982.

As an organisation it has focused on working in areas defined as "deprived" on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. It aims to support adults and young people who are struggling with involvement in Scotland's criminal justice system, long term unemployment and mental health and wellbeing issues. The charity has built up extensive experience of working safely and reflectively in outdoor settings with clients who have had significant adverse experiences.

In 2016, Venture Trust set up psychodynamic wilderness therapy programmes with outdoor and clinical practitioners collaborating on service design and delivery. Building on this experience, the Outdoor Therapy Service was launched in 2020.

The Outdoor Therapy Service offers free 1:1 therapy in outdoor settings, throughout Scotland's central belt. The criterion for accessing the service is that the person, of any age, has faced or is facing some form of adversity. The clients work with accredited therapists for up to twenty sessions in green and blue spaces within the client's local community. These spaces may be woodlands, parks, beaches, and coastal walks. They could also include spaces such as a football pitch or green area in a housing estate.

The Presentation

This conference presentation is about the Venture Trust Outdoor Therapy Service, a unique offer in the UK, specifically developed to meet the needs of our clients.

In the presentation I will outline what have come to underpin the foundations and key components of our service, along with reflecting on our observations. I also hope to answer these questions:

- What is it about the Outdoor Therapy Service that meets the needs of our clients?
- What have we learned from delivering over 2500 1:1 therapy sessions to 210 clients since its creation?



Underpinning Foundations

- Our therapists are professionally trained and practising within clearly established ethical therapeutic guidelines. They will have spent time exploring their personal relationship with the natural world and must hold the relevant outdoor qualification for the environment in which they practise.
- We have a careful assessment process for clients, which is regularly reviewed.
- Ongoing consideration is given to manging of boundaries and maintaining of the therapeutic frame of the work.
- Therapists within the team come from multiple therapeutic modalities, with a **theory of change** that informs their practice. Connecting these practices is a foundation in a **relational therapeutic process**. With the outdoor environment being incorporated into the traditional therapeutic dyad to form a triad, with **nature as co-therapist**.

Key Components

- **Accessible locations**, both from the practical aspect of being able to attend therapy, as well as clients being able to return to these spaces once the work has ended.
- The importance of **the democratising influence** of working in the way we do - 'meeting the client where they're at' is foundational to the service.
- **Embodied processes** – the inherent movement that forms part of sessions supports a variety of embodied processes; embodied movement, embodied metaphor, sensory self-soothing/ emotional regulation, lived/embodied experience of change. These processes are particularly relevant because they support trauma recovery, and a high percentage of our client group have been diagnosed with PTSD or C-PTSD. We have also found this not only to be of benefit to neurodiverse clients, but also what attracts neurodiverse clients to the service.
- Working with clients in their local environments outdoors has shown the potential to develop a connection or relationship with nature thus developing an **ecological sense of self** as well as a **connection to community**. Relationships they can continue to foster and develop upon completion of therapy, thus hopefully leading to prolonged wellbeing.
- Working with clients in a very live rather than static sense. This has been most notable in working specifically with client experiencing social anxiety and anxiety around leaving their home.

Ongoing Observations

- Outdoor therapy as a Stepping-stone. Experience has taught us that for some clients, outdoor therapy is perceived as less formal than traditional therapy and perhaps more accessible. We have seen that for clients who experience breakdowns in relationships with professional workers, particularly those with diagnoses such as EUPD (Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder), that working therapeutically in this way may help in the journey to reconnect with wider statutory services.
- We continue to see increasing numbers of neurodiverse clients. These clients note that working side-by-side and being able to move freely in sessions, as well as finding locations that suit their sensory needs, are important components of being able to attend therapy.
- We continue to review how we can make the service the most accessible it can be to those who traditionally experience barriers in accessing the mental health support they require.



MOUNTAIN & WILDERNESS SPACE PRESENTATION

The Discovery Project: An experimental, multi-agency adventure project for 'at-risk' young people



John Fortune, RISE Project

About the author - Personal Journey

After graduating in Health & Leisure Studies from I.T. Tralee in 1999, I worked in leisure and outdoor education in Ireland, Australia, and Spain. Then, after a few years working as a tree surgeon, I returned to working with young people, graduating in Youth Work in 2014 and in Social Care in 2018. I worked in youth work, residential care and adventure therapy before setting up the RISE project in 2020.

The Rise Project

Operating since March 2020, the RISE project is Tusla-funded to provide early-intervention, adventure therapy, and social care for 12 to 17-year-olds in North Wexford. We only accept referrals from Tusla Social Workers and we aim to provide responsive, solution-focused and needs-driven interventions, aimed at preventing entry into the care system.

99% of our work is 1-to-1 and we work to help our VIPs make positive changes to their own situations. We are based in the local community in Gorey Youth Needs Group and we took on the role of lead agency in the Discovery Project.

The Presentation

When the application paperwork for the Community Safety Innovation Fund landed on my desk in May 2022, it seemed like a challenge beyond what our small project was capable of, as we are not involved in youth justice, or community safety, or development. On closer inspection, my manager, Mandi, and I identified the scope for a community safety project targeting the young people in our community at risk of 'falling through the cracks' in society, as they are not 'bad' enough to meet the thresholds for either Social Work or youth justice interventions.

Firstly, we asked to meet with the local Juvenile Liaison Officer and a Youth Diversion Project worker who I knew. We talked them through our ideas for the project, decided to apply, and submitted our application on time for June 2022. We expected a start date in August and to have the project completed within a year. However, when the grant did not materialise until November, we planned to run the project on school holidays in 2023, to be completed by the end of the year.

The objectives of the project were to:

1. Improve the mental health of participants
2. Reduce criminal and antisocial behaviour in participants
3. Complete a community enhancement project

Our initial plan was based on six 3-day blocks of adventurous and therapeutic activities, coupled with a community enhancement project, for a group of up to ten young people from our local area. We decided that older teenagers would be more easily recruited from the young people involved with the local services for young people. We planned to involve the JLO (Juvenile Liaison Officer) and YDP (Youth Diversion Project) workers alongside Community Gardai, our other local youth service (FDYS -Ferns Diocesan Youth Service) and the School Completion Project.

Each block would begin with a bushcraft session, cooking food on a campfire, where a local psychotherapist would facilitate a group process session for the group. The community enhancement project would most likely involve the local Tidy Towns group. We would try to measure outcomes somehow and a report would be prepared to show the value of the work.



By the end of 2022, various changes had been made to the proposed project. Most importantly, we had decided to drop the idea of the group process, as it might feel too contrived and intimidating to participants. Instead, we would find 'an Adventure Therapy person' who would oversee the leaders in their therapeutic work with the group and also research, measure and report on the project.

Dr. Stephan Natynczuk was on top of the list and he jumped at the chance to be involved. Over the next few months, Stephan and I thrashed out the parameters for the project, decided on a simple measurement tool and organised online training seminars for the leaders recruited from the participating services.

Another important change was to include more young people by splitting the group into two age groups: 12-14 year olds and 15-17 year olds. We also tried to accommodate more people in each group to extend the reach of the project. We decided to work with the 15-17s first, as they would be easier to recruit at short notice among the participating services.

The final major change was to invest our time and energy in people rather than infrastructure: to train the participants in First Aid or do a charity fund-raiser, rather than cleaning the streets.

We organised an information evening for the participants and their parents, which had a 40% turn-out, roughly as expected. Timetables and permission forms were distributed and collected.

Activities for the first block were planned before we met the group, but we used each block to allow the participants vote on the activities for the next block, from the list they compiled together with the leaders.



The bushcraft session to start the project was an instant success and breakfast rolls cooked and prepared by the group on a fire in the woods ensured their buy-in.

The activities that followed were Airsoft, indoor rock-climbing, Zero Latency, mountain biking, team building at The Stables, Beyond the Trees, a trip to Glendalough, one-day First Aid course, The Devil's Kitchen, Sheilbaggan OEC, Viking Splash and Kylemore Karting.



Brainstorming among the group leaders, a morning session was organised on the final block, where local ambulance crew presented participants with their First Aid certs before a tour of the fire station and car-cutting demonstration, a meeting with the Garda Armed Support Unit and a tour of the Garda station. This was a huge success and obviously improved relationships between participants and leaders.

The second half of the project was largely similar to the first, with slightly more repetition of activities and less interest in the community enhancement project from the younger participants.

Preliminary findings indicate that the project was a huge success. Participants' expectations were met or exceeded in all but a few situations beyond our control. Some altruistic behaviour was evidenced in the feedback forms and participants expressed gratitude to the leaders for their involvement. Final reporting for the project is expected in early 2024.

In Lasmuigh Issue 5

Out in Spring 2024

Sustainability and Environmental Education in Outdoor Sports
By Noel Doyle, Leave No Trace Ireland

The Importance of Being Warm – Injury Prevention and Improved Performance in Surfing
By Paulina Gruszka and John Pierce

Croagh Patrick Community Ambassador Programme
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