

Case Study: Dorset's Natural Health at its best

Delivering a Green Prescription Service: Natural Choices



Lead Partner: Dorset LNP

Other Partners: 23 providers including DWT, RSPB, National Trust, Livability Holton Lee, DCC LiveWell Dorset, Public Health Dorset



Health Walk, Radipole Lake © RSPB

Project Summary

Natural Choices is a green prescription service which aims to encourage, and enable, people to support or improve their physical health and mental wellbeing through different activities set within the natural environment.

Activities are delivered by a range of providers and include sessions such as nature walks, outdoor mindfulness, practical conservation volunteering, gardening and Park Yoga.

People can self-refer or can be signposted to activities for example via LiveWell Dorset, carers support services, or Steps2Wellbeing. People are encouraged to attend for 12 weekly sessions with the aim of supporting a change in behaviour, which they may continue beyond the initial period and support ongoing health benefits.

Testimonial:

"These sessions have been amazing at giving me much more confidence in myself, but also far greater confidence about going outside and being in nature. I now go out regularly by myself and love being down by the river. It's so calming! The cherry on top was seeing an otter this week – it was tremendous!"

Attendee at a Stour Valley activity

Who is it aimed at?

Natural Choices supports adults who want to support their physical and mental wellbeing. Activities under Natural Choices are geared towards beginners – getting people outside who don't normally do these types of activities and would benefit from encouragement and guidance from a trained activity leader.

Activities are aimed at those with low level health needs for example those who wish to get fitter, reduce a sedentary lifestyle, experience low risk mental health issues, such as low mood, mild anxiety or stress. Some activities are more physically demanding than others.



Conservation Volunteering at Lorton Meadows © Sam Dallimore: DWT



Kingcombe Health Walk © Emma Kane

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Park Yoga Weymouth © Sharon George



Accredited and non-accredited

Natural Choices has activities which are Accredited and Non-accredited to help people to choose which activity to try and to give assurances to those referring or signposting to the programme:

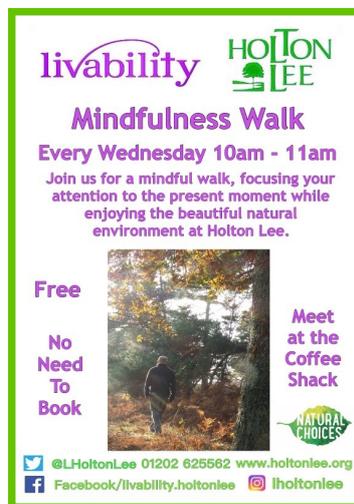
- Accredited activities are regular (weekly/fortnightly) and activity providers have public liability insurance and health and safety policies.
- Non-accredited activities are less frequent (e.g. monthly) and/or providers are community groups without insurances or policies but activities are equally beneficial to health and wellbeing.

What are the health benefits?

Natural Choices aims to get people more active by undertaking activities focused on the natural environment. Activities are set within a group session which can support loneliness and build people's confidence by developing new skills and meeting new people so can help to improve low-level anxiety and low-mood.

Growing evidence demonstrates the engaging with nature improves mood and supports the Five Ways to Wellbeing:

- Be active
- Take notice (be curious)
- Connect
- Keep learning (try new skills)
- Give (e.g. volunteer time)



Mindfulness Walk Poster
© Livability Holton Lee

Other benefits

Natural Choices supports health care professionals with an easy pathway to signpost people with physical and mental health issues to a wide range of recognised providers offering activities using the natural environment.

The programme also enables people to self-refer to enabling them to support or improve their health and wellbeing by connecting to nature.

More Information:

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Testimonial

"I've been going for about two months now and always really look forward to my Sunday morning class - I've been introduced to Lorton Lane meadows, which I never knew existed, and find the session really restorative. By doing it each week, it has helped me be more mindful during the week. The classes are very fun and interactive thanks to a brilliant teacher and we do loads of practice - it's not just talking about it - it's doing it, in lovely nature in Dorset too! I can't recommend it highly enough to anyone whatever their situation!"

Attendee at a Mindfulness in Nature session