

Summary of the Evaluation of Natural England's Action Research Projects

In 2004 the Countryside Agency, now part of Natural England, commissioned an evaluation of four Action Research Projects (ARP). These ARPs formed part of Defra's Diversity Review, which identified some people as under-represented in accessing the natural environment. These under-represented groups were disabled people, black and minority ethnic people (BAME), people who live in inner city areas and young people. The aim of the ARPs was to develop and test outreach methods which would lead to a sustainable connection between under-represented people and the natural places they visit.

This document summarises the main conclusions from the final evaluation and accompanies a set of four case stories.

1.0 Overall conclusions from Action Research Projects

1.1 Engagement with the outdoors

The evaluation found three of the four ARPs more successful in engaging under-represented communities in a range of activities both during the project and beyond. Finding Common Ground had shorter term success with this.

'Stepping Out' fully engaged participants in the benefits of the outdoors in the final two years of the project, after establishing an improved approach to focus on young carers.

1.2 Engaging participants in the project design

'By All Means' and 'Finding Common Ground' closely engaged their participants in the design of their projects:-

- For 'By All Means' this worked extremely well and is clearly illustrated in the sustainability of sub projects through the efforts of participants.
- 'Finding Common Ground' could have been more successful, had it been less ambitious in seeking to develop friendships between rural and urban women. Despite this, the project shifted its focus to its host, Groundwork and became successful in other ways.

1.3 Impact on host organisations

All ARP's successfully secured change in their host organisation and partner organisations.

'By All Means' took advantage of the Forestry Commission's commitment to provide all ability access trails, cycles and a Trumper mobility vehicle. The project effectively raised awareness in Kent of the opportunities and services available to people of all abilities at Bedgebury (Forestry Commission). As a direct result of the project; staff at Bedgebury were able to realise in practice some of their own diversity policies.

'Finding Common Ground' increased links between Groundwork and the rural service providers involved during the ARP. Staff developed shorter walking routes and made them more accessible by public transport. These changes were implemented by various local authorities.

Through 'Stepping Out', staff from the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust described an increase in visits from young people, and one of the outdoor groups that had become self-sustaining still come to the site at Brandon Marsh Nature Centre. This increase in visits by young carers was instrumental in the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust being awarded the Me2 award for working with young people with disabilities. At the Coventry Carers Centre, involvement in Stepping Out has led to more outdoor activities for the centre, indicating a sustained interest in the countryside.

Since 'Beyond the Boundary', the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) has developed a "Go Dales" project that involves youth organisations from Bradford, in a similar way as 'Beyond the Boundary' involved the cricket clubs. The YDNPA has also changed its publications to be more accessible to BAME communities. Monitoring and evaluation skills staff picked up from the ARP have been integrated into the YDNPA's practices and they now keep more demographic data as well as monitor trends in the diversity of visitors. This improved data collection has made it possible to monitor the rise, for example in the use of BAME communities in the Yorkshire Dales.

2.0 Lessons Learned

The evaluation found a number of clear lessons emerging from these projects;

- Future programmes should ensure that all projects have realistic and achievable objectives, for example, providing opportunities for greater understanding between communities rather than aiming to create friendships
- Involving participants in designing and redesigning projects is valuable and would benefit from being set as a clear objective from the outset.
- Ongoing self evaluation provides an opportunity for projects to reflect and reshape their outcome when it is not meeting its objectives.
- A project can still contribute to wider change, even if it does not always deliver all of its set objectives. It is important to identify desired outcomes in both host and partner organisations.

More Information

For details on this and all the Action Research Projects visit www.naturalengland.org.uk

For more information about the Diversity Review and the Action Research Projects contact:

Melanie Maylen, Natural England

T: 0300 060 1698 M: 07827 833665 melanie.maylen@naturalengland.org.uk

Defra continues its work to increase the number of people from under-represented groups who access the natural environment through its 'Outdoors for All' programme. For more information contact:

Helen MacVicker, Natural England

T: 0300 060 4232 M: 07887 822652 helen.macvicker@naturalengland.org.uk

Accessibility

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