

Save Our Magnificent Meadows Grasslands Conference, March 2017

Workshop C - How can 'wellness' be incorporated into how we manage species rich grasslands and are there any conflicts?

Summary notes from the discussions that took place in the four workshops'

“Wellness is defined as being comfortable, healthy and happy”

There are well documented physical and mental health benefits to being outside.

It is important:

- to provide opportunities and access for the key audiences.
- to understand what people need to feel better, in order to deliver it.
- to organise activities appropriate to the audience ie provide bite sized things that people can achieve.

How can wellness be incorporated into how we manage species rich grasslands?

Occupational Therapy/ Nature-based therapy: Provide a weekly session where people go outdoors (their safe space) for a short period. People can engage with nature (plug planting and physical management of the meadow) and this can also help people with issues related to grief (nature lifecycle). Many of these people might not be nature lovers, but once engaged people tend to return. Grasslands can provide a sense of belonging, somewhere to allow you to be yourself; it can be a permanent element in a fast changing world. By taking people out of their usual situation to be somewhere different, it can change their perspective.

Mindfulness & creating positive memories: Find ways to get people out into a meadow to simply enjoy them as a peaceful space for reflection. Use nature as a break from the normal routine. There is also mindfulness related to art (slow thinking): ie tapestry, painting and botanical illustration. Go to the meadow (in a group or individual) and come back with new ideas (artistic response). An example: the lady who makes the pot (in Somerset WT presentation) inspired by wildflower seed found satisfaction /wellbeing and a connection with the nature where she lives. Another example can be making clay pots with the soil in the meadow.

Landscape restoration: People can feel a sense of achievement; they can make a difference by working together to create wild areas or new parks. This can help build confidence, leading to people feeling valued and part of a community. This work can provide a place for social interaction where new friends can be made, bringing people together from different backgrounds with a common goal.

Create a series of walks: Try to get green prescriptions from the health system ie walking for health. Set up “Memory Walks” which can help people with dementia. The smell of wildflowers can help them to remember their farming/meadow memories and feel better/ connected. People with dementia feel better when they are in contact with the natural world.

Create urban meadows: close to the cities or larger companies and make leaflets so people know where they can find a meadow to walk and relax. Propose walks through the meadow to do during the lunch break (20 mins walks).

For children:

- Find ways to use the meadows to suit their different needs: for example kids that have difficulties for sleeping, meditation in early years, learn how to enjoy the simple pleasures (ie. see a plant grow through the seasons) and be able to share the experience with others.
- Meadow school intervention: use as a "safe space" for children that are excluded from school (it can be a life changing experience) or achieve something physical in their landscape for children with attention difficulties (ie Make flower bombs).
- Use grazing animals as a therapy (cows, ponies...) which will appeal to children in particular.

Economic benefits of incorporating wellness into grassland management

- Promote knowledge of nature value.
- Prevention is cheaper than a cure.
- It is a fact that the human recovery time after illness decreases when you are in contact with nature.
- Soft and hard skills can be learnt through managing the habitat ie working in a team, turning up on time and communicating effectively. It can increase skills and therefore access to work. An example: Sheffield youth unemployment scheme-bringing grassland into high quality management has transferred community attitude and helped people back into work.
- Employing contractors to do work.
- Bee hives - medicinal use of local honey for hay fever.
- Living in an area with green spaces is perceived as being nice and so attracts people with money to an area which may help raise economic prosperity and makes it more attractive generally to investors.

Who are the Key audiences?

- Mental health charities
- Dementia groups
- Drug dependencies
- GPs for referrals
- Pensioners
- Unemployed
- Healthy walking groups
- Low social economic areas
- Farmers & communities suffering from rural isolation

What are the conflicts?

- The challenge is to change the mindset, for it to be normal for people to use these spaces. Marketing is key, we are already doing some of this work but sometimes it should be promoted differently to attract different audiences and funding.
- Young people don't have memories of meadows whereas people over 50 do.
- It can be very difficult to engage with groups and this must be set up and in place before a project starts.
- GPs and referrals are hard to get as they need to be aware of the options and must be willing to give out "Green prescriptions". Referrals can take a lot of work/time.
- Funding is often hard to secure and temporary. Finding funding for this can take you away from what you had set out to do in the first place.
- Different skills set needed to "deliver wellness". We are not qualified social workers' we can therefore only be third party partners which must be backed up with health care professionals. We are only qualified to tackle prevention rather than cure.
- Often nature conservation and wellness are merged but this can be a problem when wanting to achieve nature conservation as this is sometimes a secondary outcome.



- There is a disassociation with where the meadows are and who would benefit from them most (eg urban communities)
- In rural communities isolation of older people is a big issue and this is not as well measured as in urban areas.
- Perceived use of the land and conflicting ideas of how it should be used can cause conflict and have the opposite desired effect on wellness.
- Some events could be ecologically damaging to some sites
- Meadow access can be a problem for elderly or disabled people
- Seasonal limited time scale.
- Safeguarding issues with young people who rely on supervisors they work in partnership with.
- Disinterest from carers can affect the experience of the service user.
- Lack of interest in the activity
- The benefits are immeasurable in both rural and urban communities.

