

## Case Study

# Green Open Spaces for Health

### Background

This report describes the early pilot phase of a wider project, jointly funded by the South Downs National Park Authority and the public health authorities of East Sussex, Brighton & Hove, West Sussex & Hampshire to develop a sustainable delivery model which will evaluate impact on health and well-being of participating in activities within the National Park.

The project has two aims: firstly to offer outdoor activities within the South Downs National Park to identified 'vulnerable' groups, made up of individuals who may not normally access the park. The nature of the activities would be based on the wishes, interests and needs of each group, but would be likely to include things like walking, creative activities such as drawing or painting, physical activities such as Tai Chi etc. or activities which involve learning about the natural environment or heritage of the park.

The second aim of the project is to evaluate the impact the activities have on the health and well-being of those taking part, with the aim of building an evidence base showing which activities have the most positive impacts on the various groups taking part.



The event was held at the Youth Hostel.

The event was led jointly by Sussex Community Development Association (SCDA) and Action in Rural Sussex (AiRS) – both of whom invited one group of participants to the event – as well as the University of Sussex Centre for Well-Being, as represented by Professor Charles Watters. South Downs Rangers led some of the activities, as well as an art facilitator.

The two groups of participants were a group of 21 older people from a housing scheme in Kingston, Lewes. The second was a group of 12 Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) residents from Seaford.

Participants spent the day walking, enjoying an art activity and learning about the Park from the SDNP Ranger. Activities were evaluated and Professor Watters spent some time holding informal conversations with participants about their health and how they had experienced the activities offered.

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# “Walking is good for your health... it boosts your mind.”

Seaford resident & pilot group participant

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## The outcome

The aim of the pilot project was to inform future development of a more ambitious programme of activities, which will be delivered throughout the summer months of 2015 across a number of sites throughout the park.

The event has had a powerful effect on many participants – particularly the group from Seaford, who now meet regularly to walk on the South Downs as an informal group of friends. They suggested in the follow-up focus group meetings that they enjoyed the experience, particularly the social element of the activity. Several people said that it has helped to reduce social isolation. Participants also acknowledged the benefits to both their physical health and well-being.

The older person’s group might have benefitted more from the walking activity if more had been done in order to improve access and mobility, either by the provision of additional walk leaders, consideration of a more accessible route or mobility aids, such as motorised chairs.

The need to increase awareness of issues around access and permission to walk on the Park was also raised, which is something that aspects of the wider project could address. Other issues were around the perception of walking as being a ‘professional’ activity, requiring expensive equipment which would exclude them.

There were very positive responses to the aspects of the course which included learning about the history and environment of the National Park. In combination with their guided experience of walking, this project would seem to indicate that participants are very likely to increase their use of the park as a result of this activity.

Although participants enjoyed the art activities, there is no evidence to suggest that this activity in itself has any impact on future use of the Park.

For further information about the Green Open Spaces for Health Project, please contact: Chris Sculthorpe at SCDA:

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## The future

Learning from this pilot has been very helpful in terms of informing the future direction of the project. It will be important to consider the physical abilities and levels of fitness of all future participants to ensure that activities are designed appropriately and are accessible. The programme of activities will be informal and social in character. Impact on health & well-being will be measured by looking at 5 domains of well-being for participants, as well as by using validated well-being measures. These 5 domains are as follows:

Entitlement and Access

Addressing Specific Health & Well-being Issues

Engaging with the Natural Environment

Activities in the National Park

Group Based Activity