

# TALKBACK

Your supporter magazine from the Mental Health Foundation

Summer 2021



Mental Health  
Foundation





# Dear Supporter,

Welcome to the Summer edition of Talkback!

This May we hosted the 21st Mental Health Awareness Week, a week where we encourage everyone to start a conversation about the importance of protecting our mental health. This year's theme, **Nature**, was chosen because being in nature is known to be an effective way of addressing mental health problems and protecting our wellbeing.

This seemed particularly important this year. And while few of us thought we'd ever be caught up in a global pandemic, it's perhaps less surprising that the one thing that has helped so many of us cope was connecting or reconnecting with nature. Our own research has shown that being in nature has been one of the most popular ways the public have tried to sustain good mental health at a challenging time.

In this edition of Talkback, we will explore our work during Mental Health Awareness Week and beyond:

1. **Tell the world** – on pages 4 and 5 you will find a summary of our MHAWeek research findings and top tips.
2. **Find solutions** – one of the first projects to launch as part of the Covid Response Programme is Living Well: Emotional Support Matters in Scotland. Learn more on pages 8 and 9.
3. **Inform and empower** – all about the successes of this year's MHAWeek on pages 6 and 7.
4. **Change policy and practice** – This year, our hope is that by growing awareness of the importance of nature for good mental health, we will also make this connection clearer for policy-makers. See our policy asks on pages 12 and 13.
5. **Build a Strong Foundation** – we partnered with Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) for a new project to assist hundreds of people gain access to nature. More on pages 10 and 11.

Last but not least, we are proud to introduce our Values – discover how our values shape us on page 14.

Thank you all for your continued support.

Kind regards,

**Kalina Peresterova, Individual Giving Officer**

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# RUTH'S STORY

Ruth Knight, participant of **Standing Together Cymru**, helps tend a communal garden at her sheltered housing complex in Newport, South East Wales. Ruth has had a **'lifelong affinity with nature'** and she wants other people to feel the benefits.

Ruth is supported by **Standing Together Cymru** – a project which aims to improve mental health, wellbeing and build community connections. Our recent survey found 72% of Welsh adults said being close to nature improves their mood whilst half said it helped them cope with stress.



**"I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for the garden," she said. "That sounds a bit dramatic but it has done an awful lot for my mental health. I can come out here feeling very uptight and that I can't cope with this. And as soon as I get dirt under my nails because I haven't put my gloves on, I'm at peace."** Ruth

**Standing Together Cymru** completed at the end of May this year, but its legacy will live on in the people that have been supported and impacted by the project – which continued throughout the pandemic by adapting from face-to-face to telephone support and making new connections between tenants across the four housing associations in South East Wales.



*Standing Together Cymru team*

# Mental Health Awareness Week Research Findings

Dr Chiara Lombardo,  
Senior Research Officer



## Nature has played a critical role in our mental health during the pandemic

Through our own research at the Mental Health Foundation, we know that spending time outdoors has been one of the key factors enabling people to cope with the stress of the Covid-19 pandemic. Throughout the pandemic, nearly half (45%) of people in the UK told us that visiting green spaces, such as parks, helped them to cope. Our findings are echoed by other research which found that people visiting and noticing nature in particular was important in supporting their wellbeing.

## Quality counts. Connecting with nature is critical



Evidence shows that the

quality of our relationship with nature is part of the reason for its positive impact on our wellbeing. Researchers use the term 'connectedness' to describe the ideal relationship.

'Connectedness' refers to the way we relate to nature and experience it. A strong connection with nature means feeling a close relationship or an emotional attachment to our natural surroundings.

There are ways that we can develop our connectedness with nature. Activities that involve the senses can help to build our connection with the natural world. For instance, we might notice the beauty of nature by listening intently to birdsong or touching the bark of trees. Smelling flowers or feeling the soil between our

fingers whilst planting bulbs in the garden are also highly effective ways to connect with nature.

We don't always have to be in nature to further our relationship with the natural world: writing a poem about our favourite nature spot or reflecting on preferred walks help us consciously notice, consider and pause to appreciate the good things in nature.

## We benefit from 'high quality' nature spaces

'High quality' natural spaces are better for us and our wellbeing.

Quality can mean higher biodiversity (a wide variety of plants and wildlife). Whether we are in rural or urban spaces, certain characteristics of nature are particularly important.

Cleaner nature areas are linked to lower rates of depression.

## Nature is everywhere, but high-quality nature isn't available equally

Deprived communities are least likely to live near a high-quality nature space.

People living with a disability or health condition often face particular barriers to access when natural spaces are not equipped with inclusion in mind or there is a lack of accessible routes.

For some groups, including many women, younger people, people with disabilities and people from ethnic minorities, nature spaces may feel inaccessible or less enjoyable because they are not safe – from risk of physical harm, sexual harassment, hate crime or discrimination.

There are good examples of initiatives in nature spaces to reduce the inequality of access. High quality urban parks, designed with accessibility in mind, can enable more people to enjoy and connect with nature. Other solutions include planting flowers, trees along our streets or even recreating natural habitats where new human developments such as a road have been built.

# OUR TOP TIPS

The key message of this research evidence is a need to shift our attention to focusing on how we can tune in and connect with 'everyday' nature close to home through simple activities. For this, we have designed our top tips:

## 1 Find nature wherever you are

It might be a garden, a local park, a nearby beach or open countryside.

## 2 Connect with nature using all of your senses

Whether you're relaxing in the garden or on your way to work, try listening out for birdsong, look for bees and butterflies, or notice the movement of the clouds.

## 3 Get out into nature

If you can, try to spend time visiting natural places - green spaces like parks, gardens or forests or blue spaces like the beach, rivers and wetlands.

## 4 Bring nature to you

Having plants in the house is a great way to have something natural to see, touch and smell – pots of herbs from the supermarket are a good start. If planting isn't your thing, you can also connect to nature through stories, art and watching documentaries.

## 5 Exercise in nature

If you're physically able to exercise, try to do it outside.

## 6 Combine nature with creativity

This could involve taking part in creative activities outside, like dance, music, or art.



# Mental Health Awareness Week

10-16 May 2021

# NATURE

## Highlights

The Mental Health Foundation started Mental Health Awareness Week (MHAW) 21 years ago. Each year the Foundation continues to set the theme, organise and host the Week which has grown to become one of the biggest awareness weeks across the UK and globally.

This year, our hope is that by growing awareness of the importance of nature for good mental health, we can also work to ensure that everyone can share in it. Nature is something that is all around us. It can be really helpful in supporting good mental health. Our ambition is to try to make that connection clearer for both individuals and policy makers.





Our **school pack** was downloaded **more than 6,000 times** and schools across the country held events.

There were thousands of unique **media mentions of the Mental Health Foundation with a reach of 58 million people**. This included The Guardian, BBC online and the Metro in **England**; BBC Radio Scotland, The Herald on Sunday and Scotland on Sunday in **Scotland**; **ITV Wales** featured an **interview with one of our case studies Ruth Knight** and other coverage by BBC Radio Cymru in Wales.

There were **over 1.1 million page views** of our MHAW content and over 9,000 downloads of our top tips.

**Dame Julie Walters** launched the **Week** which got over 200 media mentions.

Our project **Standing Together Cymru** was featured on ITV Main News Wales.

**Prime Minister Boris Johnson** referenced Mental Health Awareness Week in his update to the nation on loosening Covid restrictions.

**Secretary of State for Health Matt Hancock** recorded mental health video with **our CEO Mark Rowland**.

**Royal Foundation of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge** issued press release mentioning the Mental Health Foundation and the theme of Nature and ran the Mental Health Minute across 300 radio stations for the fourth year in a row.

This year saw both **MHAW hashtags trending in the UK on Twitter for a first time ever** – at #1 and #2.



# Covid Response Programme (CRP) launched in Scotland

Claire Fleming  
Communications & Marketing  
Manager (Scotland and NI)



**Since March 2020 we have been studying the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the nation. Our research has shown that pre-pandemic inequalities, a root cause of poor mental health, have been exacerbated by Covid-19 and social distancing restrictions.**

That's why we are committing at least £2 million over the next two years to support people and communities across the UK whose mental health has been more harshly impacted by the events of the last year. With support from partners and funders, including The Monday Trust which is contributing £750,000, we will be working with lone parents, Black and minority ethnic communities, refugees, and people with long term conditions.

We will work with public and third sector organisations to deliver person-centred mental health and wellbeing programmes and interventions within the community.

We will also place focus on research and learning to ensure we gain insight into what works to deliver prevention focused activities on a larger scale.

**Mark Rowland, Chief Executive of Mental Health Foundation, said:**

"All of us have had to weather the Covid-19 storm, but not all of us have been in the same boat in terms of the pressures we've faced and resources we have to protect our mental health. The **Covid Response Programme** will provide preventative mental health support, tailored to the needs of the communities that our research has shown have faced particular challenges – lone



parents, those with long-term physical health conditions and people from racialised communities.

Our aim for the **Covid Response Programme** is, above all, to empower people to have good mental health. We will work with third sector organisations across the UK to build their capacity to further support the mental wellbeing of their service users. We recognise the incredible work delivered by the voluntary sector, particularly in the last year, and the great relationships that they have nurtured with communities. We are confident that working together like this will support people and communities at higher risk of poor mental health to live mentally healthy lives.”

The **Covid Response Programme** is not grant giving and won't involve a tender process. Our partners have been selected based on their expertise and experience of evidence-based practice working with people who represent the priority groups of the programme.

One of the first projects to launch as part of the **Covid Response Programme**, is **Living Well: Emotional Support Matters**. Delivered in partnership with Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, the project will support people across Scotland who are living with a long-term condition.

Over the summer we will announce our eight delivery partners for the project. All working with people living with various long-term conditions, these third sector organisations will help us ensure that we reach as many population groups as possible in both urban and rural locations, including different genders, ethnicities and age groups.

*“We are delighted to be launching the Living Well: Emotional Support Matters programme in Scotland this month. We know that our third sector delivery partners are experts in the conditions they represent and are best placed to develop, promote and protect the wellbeing of the communities they work alongside. We at the Foundation are on hand to share our mental health expertise and resources. Together we hope to reach thousands of people living with a long-term condition and provide them with the knowledge, tools and skills to aid positive mental health and wellbeing.”*

#### **Ghizala Avan**

Programmes Manager (Adults) at  
Mental Health Foundation in Scotland



#### **Thank you to all the funders involved in the Covid Response Programme**

- The Monday Charitable Trust
- Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (The ALLIANCE)
- Betsi Cadwallader University Health Board
- Cardiff City Football Foundation

# Blue Prescribing

Fiona Halton, Head of Corporate Partnerships

## The Mental Health Foundation has partnered with the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) to launch a project called Blue Prescribing.

It is fully funded by **Simplyhealth** - one of our corporate partners and the UK's leading health solutions company aiming to improve access to healthcare.

The project brings together experts from both organisations to run a six week, nature-based health programme at WWT London Wetland Centre starting this summer. The project will benefit up to 300 local people from different communities who have experience of poor mental health.

**"There are just so many healthy distractions that you can forget about the pain in your body and your head a little bit, or worries that you have had going on in your head, for hours on end."** Project participant

**"This is something outside, it's something bigger than myself. It's something to be connected to."** Project participant

The initiative has been set up in response to findings that being in nature can reduce psychological stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression and that access to blue and green space is associated with better health. This is backed up by YouGov research, released by the Mental Health Foundation that shows that 65% of people find being near water (coast, rivers, lakes and ponds) has a positive impact on their mental health.\*

Thanks to Simplyhealth's support we can provide this course free of charge to people referred through their GP, NHS link workers and other social prescribing networks.



*“We are delighted to be working with WWT to build people’s self-confidence in looking after their own mental health. I am looking forward to running courses that prevent poor mental health in the beautiful environment of the London Wetland Centre”*

**Jolie Goodman**  
Mental Health Foundation  
Programme Manager for  
Empowerment and Later Life

If you would like to self-refer please contact us at [blueprescriptions@wwt.org.uk](mailto:blueprescriptions@wwt.org.uk) leaving your name, address, email and/or additional contact details, reasons for contact and any further information you wish to share.

If you do not have access to the internet, please call **0208 409 4400**.



\*The YouGov research cited in this article was commissioned by the Mental Health Foundation. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 4,274 UK adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 6th-8th April 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).



# Mental Health Awareness Week Policy Asks

Adam Nice, Policy and Public Affairs Officer

## Nature's wellbeing is intrinsic to our own experience of health and wellbeing.

While there are steps we can take in our own lives to improve our connection with nature, national governments and local authorities have a vital role in determining the quantity and quality of nature that we can experience and access.

That is why, for **Mental Health Awareness Week**, we made the following policy recommendations on nature and mental health:

### Facilitating connection with nature

Research shows that connection with nature is the most important factor for achieving improved mental wellbeing from nature - more important than the time a person spends in nature and the number of times they visit nature.

**We therefore recommended that nature-based wellbeing programmes should use connection with nature as the principal measure of the programme's success.**

### Protecting the natural environment and restoring biodiversity

The natural environment has the potential to be enormously beneficial to our health and wellbeing, yet almost everywhere we look, the role and visibility of nature is diminishing. We need government action to turn this around.

**We have called for the UK Government to set ambitious targets for the reversal of biodiversity loss, prioritising biodiversity gain in deprived areas to bring the wellbeing benefit of nature to the communities needing it most.**





## Building a life-long relationship with nature

There is a pronounced “teenage dip” in interest in and connection with nature, which begins to wane during the early teenage years and does not typically recover until a person’s thirties.

**We recommended that nature should be woven into secondary-school life as a way of teaching curriculum subjects. In addition, school estates should prioritise and protect green areas on school properties.**

## Using the planning system and urban design to improve the visibility and availability of nature in every local area

Nature should be around us all the time. It should not be confined to parks and designated green areas. To improve its visibility and availability, we called on local authorities, planners, and urban designers to build nature in to every local environment.

**Special attention should be given to natural places of pause and rest, such as around bus stops and in places where queues regularly form.**

## Improving access to nature

The wellbeing benefits of nature are not evenly distributed, partly because the people who stand most to benefit from nature are least able to access it. We want local authorities to increase the number of high-quality parks and green areas available to communities, especially in deprived areas with poor existing provision.

**We have also called on them to improve the safety and physical accessibility of parks and green spaces, so that they can be enjoyed by people of all ages, genders, races, and levels of physical ability.**

With the UN climate change conference (COP26) in Glasgow in November, and the Environment Bill going through the UK Parliament, 2021 is a year of enormous opportunity to begin to turn the tide. We hope the UK Government will take action that recognises nature as being fundamental to human wellbeing.

*Our detailed policy briefings on Nature and Mental Health (for England and for Wales), and our MHAW reports (for the UK and for Scotland) are available on the MHAW pages of our website.*

# Our values

## Making a difference

**What this means:** We are passionate about the role we can play in **achieving positive change**. We are about the outcome, not the glory. We **generate and share evidence** of what works. We are creative and action focused.



## Side by side

**What this means:** We achieve through **working together**. We pursue **connection** and shared understanding. We embrace difference and **lived experience**. We trust our people and partners, and make space for reflection, fun and personal growth. We recognise, and **own our power** and privilege, and act with humility.

## Determined pioneers

**What this means:** We are passionate, committed, strive for **excellence** and rigour. We wrestle with tough issues and topics, willing to hold tension and complexity. We **search for new approaches**, challenge convention and push boundaries.



## Walking our talk

**What this means:** We **embrace diversity** and operate with openness, prioritising the mental health of our staff and supporters. We recognise and learn from our mistakes and **seek honest feedback**, without spin. We recognise the need to **keep listening** and acting with authenticity.

# Making Prevention Happen – policy influencing in Wales

Emily Wooster, Senior Policy Manager (Wales)

**During the last year, the pandemic has brought devolution to everyone's attention. Almost every day in the news, we have been reminded that the governments in Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland make their own laws and rules on how to deal with the pandemic, as the newsroom journalists have moved effortlessly between news and updates from the four nations.**

Of course, devolution isn't new, and it has been the case for some time that, for the Mental Health Foundation and others, furthering the prevention agenda in Wales has required tackling many of the challenging issues that are devolved to the Senedd (Welsh Parliament). These devolved issues include education, early years, inequalities, health, social care, housing and the environment.

On May 6th, there was an Election in Wales which gave us the opportunity to elect the Members of the Senedd who will take forward these issues over the next four years. The elections were also the first opportunity for 16 and 17 year olds to vote. To that end, in February, the Foundation launched our Welsh Election Manifesto.



This draws on all of our prevention work to-date, including the work going on in Wales, and makes a number of calls for action from the new Government. Our primary call is for a new cross-government strategy on preventing mental health problems in Wales, which should include how the Government will address inequalities such as poverty, rural mental health and racial inequalities.

We were all delighted when the new Mental Health and Well-Being ministerial position in Wales was announced last October. Following the elections, Lynne Neagle MS has been appointed as the new Deputy Mental Health Minister. Over the next year, we will be working with her and with all of Welsh Government to ensure that prevention is front and centre of the new programme for Government in Wales.

**Our Wales Manifesto, *Making Prevention Happen*, is available on our website [mentalhealth.org.uk](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk).**

# More than 1 in 10

UK adults (12%) spent  
up to one hour or less  
in nature per week.

Nature research briefing, Mental Health Foundation





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