

# Kindlewoods CIC

Evaluation report  
January 2019

Melody Clarke  
Beware of the Bull Ltd

# Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Overview and key findings .....        | 3  |
| Background .....                       | 4  |
| Methodology .....                      | 5  |
| Need for the project .....             | 6  |
| Summary of results .....               | 7  |
| Case studies .....                     | 11 |
| Recommendations and further work ..... | 12 |
| Appendices .....                       | 13 |
| References .....                       | 14 |

## Overview and key findings

This evaluation study offers a snapshot assessment of the effectiveness of Kindlewoods CIC's Woodland Wellbeing programme in terms of the extent to which it achieves its three intended outcomes for participants.

Key findings of this study are:

- The programme is effective in promoting wellbeing for its participants
- Both the environmental activities and the mindfulness elements of the programme are very highly valued by participants
- There remains a significant local need for this work.

## Background

Kindlewoods, a woodland social enterprise based in North Yorkshire, was started in 2012 and registered as a Community Interest Company in 2017. The organisation currently delivers two activity streams:

- Sustainable management of local woodland, and
- Woodland wellbeing programmes.

Designed around the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* model<sup>i</sup>, Kindlewoods' woodland wellbeing programme uses a person-centred, holistic approach to help participants to achieve three outcomes:

- build resilience,
- develop confidence, and
- learn new skills.

The activities that participants engage in comprise a wide range of practical environmental tasks, from conservation and bushcraft to green woodwork.

In addition to the practical tasks, each session includes a group reflection, in which the ideas behind the Five Ways to Wellbeing model are discussed in relation to the participants' own experiences and concerns. This reflection is intended to give participants the opportunity to learn practical mindfulness tools and strategies that can be used within and outside the sessions to support their mental health and wellbeing.

## Methodology

The evaluation comprised the following methodological elements:

### **Desk-based research**

The evaluator carried out a **literature review** focusing on areas of local need and specific difficulties faced by people experiencing a need for increased personal resilience, confidence and skills.

The existing project **monitoring system** was considered, with a view to identifying any improvements that could be implemented in the future.

### **Interviews / observation**

Two evaluators visited the Wellbeing Programme session at Rawcliffe Park on 20th December 2018. They acted as participant observers and carried out semi-structured interviews with 6 participants aged from 20 to 58 (average = 38). Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes.

The interviewer's prompt sheet is included at Appendix I.

Activities observed in operation were:

- collecting firewood
- maintaining the campfire
- preparing and cooking bread over the campfire
- greenwood whittling
- erecting rainproof shelter
- group reflection

## The need for the project

York's Health and Wellbeing Strategy acknowledges "that mental health services in York are still not good enough; that more support needs to be given [...]; and that intervening earlier would be far more effective"<sup>ii</sup>. 20% of York residents report "high anxiety", with 6% diagnosed with depression. However, numbers of people accessing the 'improving access to psychological therapy' (IAPT) programme in the Vale of York are consistently lower than the England average, and also lower than the majority of CCG areas judged to be most similar to Vale of York<sup>iii</sup>.

The Health & Wellbeing Strategy outlines focus areas for the strategy period, including a focus on mental health recovery and rehabilitation, and a commitment to enabling residents to manage long-term conditions. The Strategy also outlines 'community-based solutions' as a key tool going forward, in a bid to reduce the use of traditional medical prescribing.

The level of need for mental health services in York identified in the 2017 JSNA has increased in recent years. Many statutory services have suffered from financial cuts, with some closing completely (including York's long-standing inpatient mental health facility at Bootham Park Hospital), and others struggling to support the number of people in need. Charitable services have taken up some of the excess but are now full to capacity, with all counselling services now having a long waiting list – some services have even been forced to close their waiting list.

## Summary of results

The Kindlewoods model of combining wellbeing education, including mindfulness with outdoors activities is designed to bring maximum benefits for participants in terms of building resilience and improving mental health and wellbeing.

Mindfulness has been shown to have a positive correlation with resilience. Bajaj & Pande (2016) found that individuals who exhibited more mindful habits 'can better cope with difficult thoughts and emotions without becoming overwhelmed or shutting down (emotionally)', and that '[p]ausing and observing the mind may (help us) resist getting drawn into wallowing in a setback'<sup>iv</sup>. In essence, taking the time to reflect on events and thoughts prevents a pattern of negative thoughts forming.

Research has also shown great benefits on mental health from engaging in mindfulness activities. The Oxford Centre for Mindfulness has found that Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) reduces the recurrence rate of depression by 40-50% over 12 months in those people who have experienced 3+ prior episodes of depression<sup>v</sup>. Another trial found that MBCT is as effective an intervention as antidepressants in terms of reducing the recurrence of depression<sup>vi</sup>.

Just spending time outdoors has been shown to have significant benefits to mental health – e.g. Ward Thompson et al (2012) found that spending time in green spaces was linked with lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol<sup>vii</sup>. The same study found that social contact when visiting green spaces had an increased association with lower levels of stress.

Mind's 5-year Ecominds study found that engaging in 'ecotherapy' (i.e. supported outdoors activities) has great benefits for people with mental ill-health. Ecotherapy activities enable participants to be active, spend time outdoors, spend time with other people and feel that their skills are valued. The study found that ecotherapy is particularly beneficial for men, who are less likely to engage with traditional mental health support services. 70% of people who took part in activities as part of the Ecominds study showed significant improvements to their mental wellbeing<sup>viii</sup>.

The observed session included six participants, and Katie, the session leader. When the evaluators arrived the fire was already alight, with seats arranged around it. Some participants were engaged in gathering and stacking firewood, while others sat around the fire chatting quietly. One participant was whittling a wooden butter knife – a project started at an earlier session. The sense of calm was notable.

Throughout the session, Katie guided various activities, enabling participants to volunteer for roles they felt drawn to, and gently supporting others to join in. The participants worked together to make a spiced bread dough and whittled sticks to use in the baking process.

Towards the end of the session, it started to rain heavily. Two of the participants immediately rigged up a large tarpaulin securely between the trees, and moved the campfire and seats under it, working together quickly and co-operatively.

The participants came together to sit round the fire for the closing reflection. Each offered a single word that for them, summed up the day's activities – 'magical', 'calm', 'happy', and so on. There was a little more chatting about the day, and sharing of personal reflections on it, and the session leader offered her own reflections and thanked the participants.

Overall, the impression that the evaluators gained from observation of the session was of a group of people who were confident and relaxed in each other's company and in the woodland environment.

When interviewed, all the participants were enthusiastic in describing skills that they had learned. It was evident that some participants felt very confident with their new skills:

*"Probably the best thing I've done is firelighting with a bowdrill. The best thing to get it alight is dried fern. Bark from a silver birch has a sort of flammable compound in it, so that's good too. We always light the fire using bushcraft – no matches or lighters! At our Christmas social I showed my 10 year old how to do it."*

*"...I've got more confidence with outdoorsy activities. I have fibromyalgia so it's helped me realise I'm not useless – I can do things."*

*"I used to do more outdoor activities but it had become completely dormant. I wasn't motivated to do it – I'd lost that enthusiasm for.... life,*



*I suppose. ... After coming here I built a bed and sliding drawer unit for Paul\*. He's alright, but he has anger issues, and he's a grumpy guy. When he saw it he said "you're not really crap at this, are you." From anyone else that would be a put down, but coming from Paul it was a truly big compliment! ... It's reawakened my creative gene, and rebuilt my confidence to do creative things."*

Participants discussed several aspects of the Kindlewoods programme that led to an increase in their resilience. The mindfulness component of the sessions was mentioned by many participants as a key benefit:

*"I was reluctant to go to a mindfulness class. You do what you need to do. ... Having something like this makes a massive difference. I was talking to my CPN about it because they've closed the waiting list so there's no therapy, which is rubbish. But having somewhere like this to come and practise mindfulness is amazing"*

*"Mindfulness I should, personally, be doing, but I forget, so it [Kindlewoods sessions] gives me a reminder to do it a bit more regular."*

Besides mindfulness, the overall benefits to mental health and wellbeing were clearly very highly valued by participants. Some attributed this to the social aspects of the sessions:

*"This is my second lot of sessions: I came on a one day taster via Selby and York Mind before this. I had gone through my NHS process and she said get in touch with Mind to keep socialising. ... Kindlewoods is great – really good. One of the issues I had was that I was very isolated. All my contacts were through Mind, which is fine, except all the conversations are about mental health, and I found that that wasn't always a positive."*

*"Having contact with people again – and I've continued to meet people outside this environment now."*

*"...it has definitely helped with my mental health... meeting new people."*

---

\* Name changed.

Others felt that the environment in which the sessions took place had a bigger impact on wellbeing:

*“It’s had a very big positive impact. As a child I used to spend a lot of time in the outside. It’s breathing fresh air, feeling free, an escape. My wife says she sees that it’s helped me a lot.”*

*“This should be something you’re offered as part of a package on the NHS – like why is this any less valid than sitting in an office talking to a counsellor?”*

*“I value the atmosphere, the fact it’s informal...it’s a space to look after my mental health - I like the vibe of it.”*

Overall, it was clear that the sessions had had a positive impact on all participants. Several people commented on the difficulty of accessing traditional mental health support in York, and expressed a wish that Kindlewoods sessions were available as part of NHS support. A number of session participants disclosed that they had attended Kindlewoods previously and had gone on to volunteer with the programme – evidencing the effectiveness of the sessions at increasing participants’ confidence.

Many participants had positive comments about the sessions, e.g.: *“It is what it is – if it changed too much it wouldn’t be Kindlewoods – don’t change! It deserves to exist, and we deserve for it to exist.”*

Other feedback from participants focused around the length of sessions (*“If I could change anything I suppose it would be to make the sessions longer; by the time you’ve got the fire lit it’s getting towards time to finish”*; *“...sometimes it feels like you’ve only just got going and it’s over”*), and accessibility of session locations (*“Transport – it’s difficult to get to”*; *“I know there’s other people who’d like to do it – but without funding it’s difficult. For example I know some people in Selby who don’t have a car, so they can’t get here”*).

## Case study

'Ben', a volunteer at the session, first started a programme with KindleWoods two years previously. After a six week course with IAPT, he was referred on to Mind sessions, who signposted him to KindleWoods. In his own words:

*"I'd been going to a group in the back of a café in Selby, and it was really quite depressing....drab and dreary... There were a lot of people who just went to moan. The mindfulness we did wasn't really doing anything for me, I was only going just to get me out of the house.... I wasn't functioning back then, I wasn't eating, or getting out of bed. Mind suggested the KindleWoods session, so I went along, and the first day I was there, it was like, 'hang on, this is better, this makes sense, this will work' ... being in the woods is great anyway – just being out in nature is just good for your soul. The mindfulness was difficult to do in a meeting room; I was struggling to connect with the moment before, you know - when the moment is drab and dreary, compared to being in the moment when the sunlight is dappling through the trees, and a fire roaring in front of you. It's like you actually want to be in that moment. And then the practical stuff...it was like, wow I could do something.... which was positive on a whole load of different levels.*

*After being at two of the programmes I become a volunteer. I was making things which someone else found useful – and you realise, I'm not absolutely useless, here's something I can do, which is useful. At home it'd be like - I'll get up, and I'll do that. You start looking for stuff to do, and you start functioning again. It gives you purpose. And then the next level up after that, was reinforcing your sense of worth, by being trusted to do stuff, and support others to do it, and you see their sense of achievement. Getting someone else to go 'wow, I can do this, I've never been able to do it! Wow, we got him sorted there – and he already had quite a bit of skill.' It was another level up. You don't notice it at the time, but you start to see yourself differently. Doing the Great Yorkshire Show, helping someone else achieve something in bushcraft, who is already skilled at it, that feels really good.*

*The people who make the effort to go and attend a KindleWoods thing are trying to make things better. Not everyone is who is going to some other course – people just want to moan, and moan about the same things, with no attempt to improve things. At KindleWoods you are already amongst people who are trying to do something positive. Your attention as well, it's diverted away from that stuff. It's a much more positive space. The good thing about it, is it's like asking people to do things for themselves incidentally – rather than 'this is your medication', 'this is your treatment'. It's 'let's just do this, let's crack on together.' It's not a doctor-patient relationship, it's 'right – we're going to do this today, and you might find it amazing, but it's okay if you don't.'*

*I'm on a crusade now to talk about mental health. It's still a taboo subject you can't talk about. KindleWoods has helped because it's being around people who have been through similar issues, being able to talk and discuss things openly. Not everyone wants to talk. It's conversations and connections, having understanding, seeing how different people deal with things, in a non-threatening reassuring environment."*

## Recommendations and further work

- It is clear that Kindlewoods sessions are highly valued by participants, and have a positive impact on confidence and mental wellbeing. It is recommended that the sessions continue.
- Kindlewoods may want to consider whether it would be possible to run additional sessions at a more accessible location as it seems likely there is demand for this based on participant feedback and knowledge of local need for mental health support.
- Based on participant feedback, Kindlewoods may also want to consider the feasibility of extending the length of sessions or running one-off longer sessions.
- Progressing from participant to volunteer seems to be a popular choice. Kindlewoods may want to consider formalising a supported volunteering programme to ensure these volunteers are getting the most out of the experience.

## Appendix: interviewer prompt sheet

**Kindlewoods evaluation visit – 21 Dec 2018**

initials      /age      /

1. What were the sessions about? Did you attend all, or some?  
*[learning, skills, confidence about skills]*
  
2. How did you hear about the sessions?  
*[referral routes/presenting issues]*
  
3. Now it's the end of this programme, how did you find it?
  
4. Are you likely to seek out more nature based activities?
  
5. Can you give me up to three things that you feel you've gained from the programme? These might be people you've met, things you've learned, changes to the way you feel in yourself, or something else.
  
6. If you could change one thing about the programme what would it be?
  
7. Anything else you'd like us to add in to our report?

**Outcomes: *learning / experience nature / social / active / happy***

## References

---

- <sup>i</sup> (2008) Five Ways to Wellbeing. New Economics Foundation, London.
- <sup>ii</sup> York's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017 - 2022, at: [https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/12806/joint\\_health\\_and\\_wellbeing\\_strategy\\_2017\\_to\\_2022](https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/12806/joint_health_and_wellbeing_strategy_2017_to_2022) [accessed 31 January 2019]
- <sup>iii</sup> York Health & Wellbeing, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, at: <http://www.healthYork.org/mental-health.aspx> [accessed 31 January 2019]
- <sup>iv</sup> Bajaj, B. & Pande, N. (April 2016) Mediating role of resilience in the impact of mindfulness on life satisfaction and affect as indices of subjective well-being. *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol 93, Pages 63-67
- <sup>v</sup> Crane, C. et al (2014) The effects of amount of home meditation practice in Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy on hazard of relapse to depression in the Staying Well after Depression Trial. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*
- <sup>vi</sup> Williams et al (2013) Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for preventing relapse in recurrent depression: A randomized dismantling trial, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*
- <sup>vii</sup> Ward Thompson, C. et al (2012) Access to Green Space in Disadvantaged Urban Communities: Evidence of Salutogenic Effects Based on Biomarker and Self-report Measures of Wellbeing. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol 153, pages 10-22
- <sup>viii</sup> (2013) *Feel better outside, feel better inside: Ecotherapy for mental wellbeing, resilience and recovery.* Mind, London