



Journeys to wellbeing

Bath's therapeutic landscape





Bath has a 2,000-year-old reputation as a place of healing and the city was pioneering in linking exercise in its green spaces to recuperation.

The Difficulty of ascending our Hills is not so great as is generally reported; but when surmounted, what beautiful Prospects do they give? And what fine Air do the invalids breathe in upon them? I will venture to say, that thirty different Rides, each sufficient for a Morning's Airing, with so many beautiful points of view and Matters of Curiosity may be found about BATH, as conducive to the Health and Pleasure of Mankind in general, as can be met with in Ten times the Space of Ground in any other Country.

John Wood 1765,
'An Essay Towards a Description of Bath'

The Bathscape partnership was born from a shared recognition of Bath's value as a landscape city, the threats it faces if neglected and the opportunities it affords for improving the lives of residents and visitors. Partners identified common themes such as an aspiration for active management, connection, inclusivity, partnership and encouraging inspiration and enjoyment.

A pre-project survey showed that 80% of residents value Bath's green and open spaces for their health benefits. Yet the city's pockets of high deprivation fall within the country's top 20% (with one within the top 10%) with significant inequalities in health and high levels of obesity, poor diet and lack of activity.

Utilising Bath's green setting as a 'Therapeutic Landscape' to support physical and mental

wellbeing has therefore been a major strand for the Bathscape scheme, aiming to:

- Identify and begin to mitigate barriers to more people accessing the landscape's wellbeing benefits
- Increase capacity and trialling ways to support health through the landscape
- Give teachers, carers and support workers greater confidence in encouraging outdoor activity
- Inspire people to explore the landscape through celebration of its natural, cultural and built heritage.

This Pathways to Impact report gives a flavour of what has happened as a result.



|| The joy of living in a city where just to raise one's eyes means a view of trees and countryside – refreshing, comforting and shielding. ||

Local resident

This city-wide effort has led to:

The Bathscape scheme encouraged wellbeing opportunities, following on from the 18th and 19th century doctors and physicians before them who urged their patients to take exercise by walking or riding in the 'Therapeutic Landscape'.

Approaches trialled included:

- Working direct with healthcare settings and professionals

- Creating tailored programmes for referrals from hands-on nature conservation and land management to sociable wellbeing walks
- Resources that service users can be signposted to
- Events and guides which promote the health benefits of exercise in green spaces and connections with nature and each other.

|| I'm looking forward to getting to know the volunteers, experiencing the walks, and seeing the wellbeing benefits firsthand. ||

Student

|| Thank you so much for the tree maps. I have given some to my ward sister and some to our therapies team, made up of physios & OTs. ||

Healthcare professional

7 delivery partners

|| I have reduced mobility and anxiety. I was wondering whether joining one of the walking groups would help me get out and move more. ||

Local resident

1364 health and wellbeing walks and activity sessions

Over **10,000** supported wellbeing opportunities for local people

151 families benefitting from **24 events** to support them together

Key ingredients

Supporting wellbeing through Bath's green setting has had the following key ingredients at its heart.

1

Creating safe, welcoming spaces

It is evident that across the scheme, the partners have been successful in making people from many walks of life and communities feel welcome and safe.

This 'open to all' and 'come as you are' feel is a vital foundation for a wellbeing programme and takes great expertise and judgement. This helps people to feel more relaxed and able to take part, share experiences and contribute whilst feeling like they can be themselves in a non-judgemental space.

Hello! ... I arrived in Britain on the 15th July 23. I would like to improve my mental health and join some activities – Photography group, Wellbeing Walks and Food for thought and have a kind of therapy to forget bad things.

Local resident

2

Reducing barriers to access

The programme has helped to identify and reduce barriers to people using nature and the landscape to support their own wellbeing, for example:

- Free opportunities to reduce financial barriers to wellbeing and recovery
- Giving a range of options so that people can choose what's right for them
- Providing group opportunities so people don't feel like they have to do things alone
- Offering low commitment activities or tasters so people can try them out and see if they like them

- Putting in place a simple structure and gentle support to help people to connect with themselves, and reach out to others and nature.

Wellbeing walks offer something people need in that they are gentle sociable walks with ad hoc flexibility so people with complex issues or health conditions can just go along when ready and not need to book in advance. This allows more freedom to take action for themselves for their health and wellbeing... I love Bathscape's Wellbeing Walks.

Social prescriber

3

Working in partnership

It has been essential to work in partnership with healthcare settings across Bath as well as Council teams and not-for-profit organisations who have the capacity to provide specialist support and programmes for those who most need it. The expertise, audiences, connections and spaces partners have brought have significantly added to what Bathscape scheme has been able to deliver, and to offer local people.

Working with local community groups; Bath City Farm; specialist organisations like Bath MIND; GP surgeries; and volunteers with varied lived experiences really helped us to shape our programme of activities to welcome a wider range of people.

Bathscape staff member



Spotlight: A Natural Pathway to recovery

Natural Pathways is a weekly group run by Bath City Farm with a focus on helping local people to improve their own mental wellbeing through connecting with nature and being outside in a social, productive setting.

Billed as ‘a small wildlife conservation group’ the sessions have become a safe haven for many attendees – helping to bring rhythm to their week, a reason to leave the house and a sense of belonging.

Some attendees feel like they would benefit from some time outside, whilst others are experiencing anxiety, low mood, depression or have suffered a more serious mental health crisis.

A third of participants arrive at the group from each of the following; Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust; self-referral and Community Mental Health services, with a few from Social Prescribing.

Through practical conservation tasks such as meadow creation and maintenance, the group aims to encourage more wildlife to the farm and the tasks provide a satisfaction in making a positive difference.

Together the participants navigate the successes and challenges of nature conservation which somewhat mirror the highs and lows of life. Hands-on activities are paired with mindful reflection and creative activities to allow time for freedom of expression and exploring experiences.

All participants say they feel more connected to nature as a result. Nearly all (98%) feel that Natural Pathways improves their mental health during or beyond sessions and two-thirds (62%) have also noticed improved physical health.

Joining the group is an important step on a journey of personal recovery for some, with many (88%) feeling more hopeful for the future as a result.

The importance of this programme as part of the wellbeing support available across Bath is clear and the impact is often profound.



I feel like I have a sense of purpose, that I am contributing to life and society, I have a feeling of connectedness with people and nature. I feel safe to be who I am and know that it's OK.

I have opened up – blossomed – working in the gardens has given me a deeper understanding of the Earth. Knowing there are people here who care and can support me when I have my ‘black cloak’ moments makes me feels safe.

Participant

Supporting the NHS Five Ways to Wellbeing

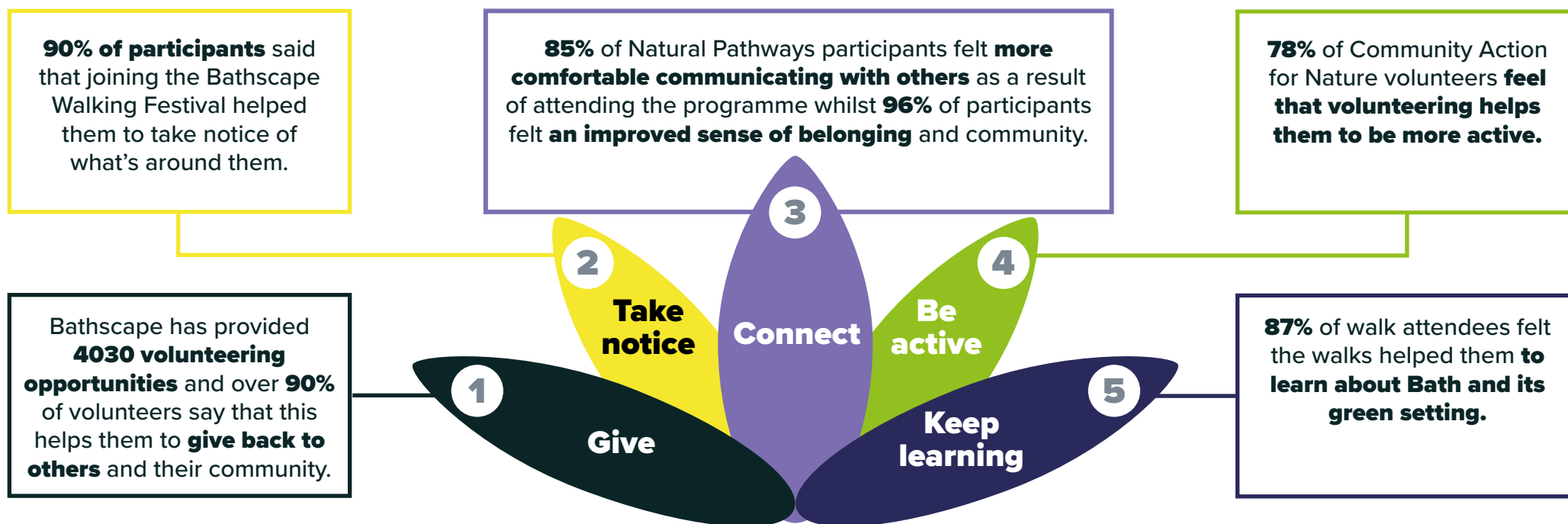
The Five Ways to Wellbeing are an evidence-led framework of simple actions which are linked to people being able to feel well and function well.

Below are just a few of the ways in which the Bathscape scheme has been able to support all five of these.

I attended a one off nature based foraging walk ran by Bathscape and Bath Mind, I realised I liked being outdoors and in nature.

Participant

Five Ways to Wellbeing



...we have been running some walking groups with some of our service users from the BANES Early Intervention in Psychosis and we have been loving your walks. We have completed two of them now and they have been really engaging, informative and open up possibilities of creating walks that engage all of the senses!

Healthcare professional

The Five Ways to Wellbeing come from research commissioned by the UK Government's Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing (2008).

They're evidence-based public health messages developed by the New Economics Foundation (NEF), drawing on a large body of psychological and economic research about what helps people feel well and function well.

Bath's landscape supports local wellbeing

The Bathscape partnership set out to deliver programmes that promote physical and mental wellbeing through increased contact with the outdoors and natural environment. Little did they know that a pandemic would make these opportunities even more vital.

The programme has specifically targeted parts of the community that can really benefit from this kind of support.

For example, Connecting Families is a Bath and North East Somerset Council service that works with families who have multiple or complex needs. This ranges from family members who have learning difficulties, are at risk of neglect or abuse, those with memory loss caused by medication or illness, are experiencing severe financial or housing challenges, or families with children not engaging with school.

The Bathscape scheme has enriched these vital services with opportunities for families to get outside and enjoy time together. The summer outdoor fun day has become a highlight of the year,

with family members pushing themselves to try new things, listen and talk to each other and building positive family memories.

From Feel Good Walks and supported volunteering to dedicated wellbeing programmes, this 'nature on prescription' has fostered a greater sense of belonging, connection to each other and community, and a sense of place which all contribute to an overall grounding effect and positive wellbeing.

Overall, the wellbeing programmes employed connecting people with the landscape and nature as a tool for getting people outdoors and engaged, meeting new people, taking time to reconnect with themselves and step out of their comfort zone in a safe environment.

Across the board, the wellbeing impacts of this are clearly evident with participants showing a range of positive outcomes from increases in confidence and being more outward looking, to a reprieve from debilitating symptoms or taking the next step on their journey, for example, to volunteering or employment.



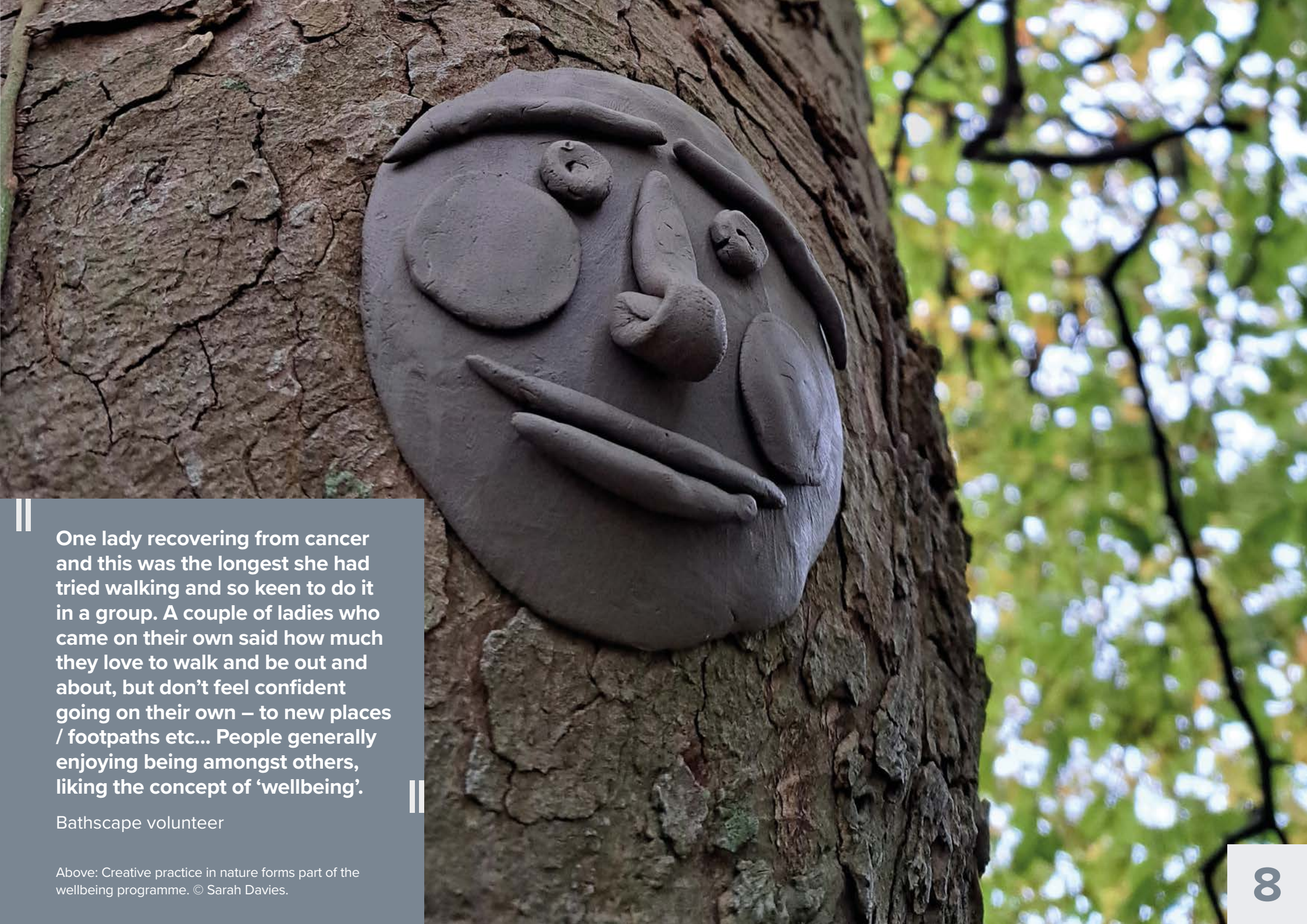
At the beginning they didn't think that they could do it [the walk], but they did, and this has helped them to have more confidence.

Bathscape partner



'The families [experiencing difficulties] that we work with really benefit from being outside with their children and young people. We have seen improved physical health, mental well-being, social skills, creativity, and connection with nature while boosting confidence and cognitive development...

Bathscape partner



One lady recovering from cancer and this was the longest she had tried walking and so keen to do it in a group. A couple of ladies who came on their own said how much they love to walk and be out and about, but don't feel confident going on their own – to new places / footpaths etc... People generally enjoying being amongst others, liking the concept of 'wellbeing'.

Bathscape volunteer

Above: Creative practice in nature forms part of the wellbeing programme. © Sarah Davies.

Outcomes achieved



People have improved wellbeing



More and a wider range of people are engaged with heritage



The local area is a better place to live, work and visit



...how immensely proud of him [I am] for getting involved with the walks, and how it's built his resilience.

Parent of participant

He [local resident with psychosis] uses the urban treescape maps a lot (and our walking booklets) and was extremely complementary about them.

The main reason for this is that it gives people a focus whilst walking through the busy area. And the fact that you can normally see the next tree means that other stressors within a busy city centre are reduced.

Healthcare professional

On [the] Ward we often have patients who are with us for quite a while. While our patients initially may not be able to go off the ward, it is always in our sights to be able to take patients outside for a change of scenery and fresh air. The tree maps are therefore a great idea as we can follow the maps with our patients and inform them about the trees.

We recently had a patient on [the ward] who was with us for several months and he really enjoyed being escorted outside and took a great interest in the tree map we gave him.

Healthcare professional



Top: A walk for blind and partially sighted people as part of the annual Walking Festival.

Above left: Participants at a bug hunting event in Twerton.

Right: A Haile Selassie walk underway as part of the annual Walking Festival.

Opposite page: Local families scaling new heights at the Kensington Meadows fun day.

|| Since the first week in this group I have felt part of something special. The activities we do benefits not only my mental and physical health through learning about and connecting with nature, but the site we are working on and the wildlife we are working for.

I feel like what we are doing on the farm is helping towards something bigger than myself, this has been important for my motivation and now I feel like I can accomplish something. ||

Participant





The Bathscape Landscape Partnership Scheme is made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Thanks to National Lottery players, the partnership has delivered 25 interconnected projects and brought together partners around a shared vision to ensure Bath and its setting are better recognised, managed and experienced as a landscape city, with the surrounding hills and valleys enhancing the World Heritage Site and actively enjoyed by all.

This Pathways to Impact report has been created by external evaluators, Heritage Insider, as part of the Bathscape end-of-Scheme evaluation. It has been built from mixed-methods evidence independently reviewed and synthesized.

Verbatim quotes have been used throughout this document in order to include stakeholders' own voices.

For authenticity, the spelling and grammar of these have not been corrected. [] denotes a deletion. ... denotes a partial quote.

Bathscape Partnership Board:

Bath & North East
Somerset Council

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www.bathscape.co.uk

Top: Wellbeing walks have been an important part of the Bathscape programme - helping local people get out and active in the landscape in a supportive, social environment.
© Ruby Barber.

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