

HEAL

Evaluation 2023



The
Evaluator
We'll figure it out for you



Green Recovery Challenge Fund


Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

The
National Lottery
Heritage Fund

 Environment
Agency

 NATURAL
ENGLAND

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GLOSSARY

Woodland	A land covered with woody vegetation, predominantly of tree species.
Ancient woodland	A woodland that has existed continuously since 1600 or before.
Wetland	An area where water covers the soil, or is present either at or near the surface of the soil. It contains vegetation that is suited to handle flooding or saturated soil.
Natural Capital	A value given to the world's stock of natural resources. It consists of assets such as water, forests, and clean air.
Detention Basin	A vegetated depression designed to hold runoff from impermeable surfaces and allow the settling of sediments and associated pollutants. Stored water may be slowly drained to a nearby watercourse, using an outlet control structure to control the flow rate.
NFM (Natural Flood Management)	Various techniques to restore or mimic the natural functions of rivers, floodplains, and the wider catchment. It aims to store water in the catchment and slow the rate at which water runs off the landscape into rivers, to help reduce flood risk to communities downstream
INNS (Invasive Non-Native Species)	Species that have been introduced (often by humans both intentionally or accidentally) to areas outside their normal geographic range.
Hedgerow	A countryside hedgerow is a boundary line of bushes which can include trees.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

Health & Environmental Action Lancashire (HEAL) is a Green Recovery Challenge Funded (GRCF) project. Ultimately this project aims to get people outdoors and has focused its work at locations where people have lower activity levels. The project blends nature recovery with capacity building through the creation of effective nature-based interventions, while training a new generation in green careers.

The £661,100 grant comes from the Government's £40 million second round of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. HEAL will create and restore habitats whilst improving health of current habitats as well as the people involved. This project was designed using specialist research and GIS analysis of data and evidence, and data from the Environment Agency and Lancashire County Council's Public Health team. The results from this analysis helped the team to **"discover where our work could have the biggest impact for nature and the environment. However, for this project we also used data on urban tree cover, mental and physical fitness, and childhood obesity. This means that we can also target areas which could potentially see the greatest positive impact on Lancashire resident's health and wellbeing."** This was an innovative use of data which was usually used to identify flood risk, land use, habitat type, rainfall levels, and tree cover.

HEAL aims to work with a wide range of people (National Lottery Heritage Fund outcome) and also to contribute to all three GRCF themes. These are:

1. Nature conservation and restoration, including ecosystem restoration and species recovery
2. Nature-based solutions, particularly for climate change mitigation and adaptation
3. Connecting people with nature.

Ribble Rivers Trust (RRT) took the lead on the delivery of this, the second round of funding and delivered a further expansive list of aims to benefit nature, the local economy and communities across Lancashire, specifically the Ribble, Lune and Wyre Catchments.

RRT list the project aims as follows¹:

Nature

- Connect people with nature across the Ribble, Lune, and Wyre river catchment areas
- Protect the many and varied species that currently make this area their home
- Create and restore habitats including 15 hectares of heathland, 2 hectares of wildflower meadow and 5 hectares of woodland.
- Plant 17 new woodlands, planting 55,000 trees across 45 hectares
- Create 800m of public footpath to increase access and the appreciation of nature
- Work with three volunteer-led micro tree nurseries to grow 4,000 trees

Local economy

- Safeguard and create jobs in Lancashire's environmental sector
- Boost the local economy and help the organisations involved become more resilient
- Strengthen and create new working relationships between local organisations and authorities

Our community

- Encourage a wider range of people to learn about heritage
- Help people develop new skills
- Encourage people to visit their green spaces, benefitting mental and physical health and wellbeing
- Give people the opportunity to learn about nature and heritage, leading to change in ideas and actions
- Train 75 people in conservation and ecological skills
- Engage 20 local schools/communities
- Deliver 80 health walks

The project originally hoped to not only help with nature recovery, but also to connect people to the outdoors through education, training, recreation, and volunteering.

To deliver this project, RRT forged strong partnerships with other organisations including: Prospects Foundation, Wyre Rivers Trust, Lune Rivers Trust, Hyndburn Borough Council, Pendle Borough Council, Lancaster University, Forest of Bowland AONB, and the Freshwater Biological Association. Harvey, Deputy Chief Executive for RRT explained, **"This is a new way of working for us which has been more involved with agreements in different ways – some as partners and some more transactional."**

¹ <https://ribbletrust.org.uk/projects/heal/>

RRT explained on their website at the start of the project that, **“We would love local residents to help with all aspects of this project. There will be that chance for everyone to work with us – no matter what skills, knowledge, or outdoor experience they have. HEAL aims to get everyone outdoors.”**

Creating partnerships enabled RRT to draw on local expertise, resources and passion of local people. This was very much a local project, for the benefit of the local people as well as the local nature.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was carried out through the following methods:

- Initial project meetings and team discussion
- Analysis of data collected by the project team (consisting of 452 lines of activity data)
- Desk research of all existing information
- Focus group with five volunteers and additional in-depth conversations with partners and staff
- Site visits to Peel Park and the Coppice LNR and Marsden Park
- Online focus group with the steering group in March 2023
- Online focus group with the wider project team in March 2023

Throughout the evaluation we have considered how RRT have branched out into wellbeing works, such as the five ways to wellbeing (connect, be active, give something back, keep learning and take notice), as well as the five pathways to nature, (contact, beauty, meaning, emotion and compassion).

Throughout this report we have shared quotes from the people, staff and partners taking part in the project to give their voices a chance to be heard.

— “

Adam, Ribble River Trust Project Manager

“Hearing how much the park meant to people, so much knowledge and passion and people cared deeply about these spaces.”



PART TWO: PROJECT ACTIVITY AND REACH

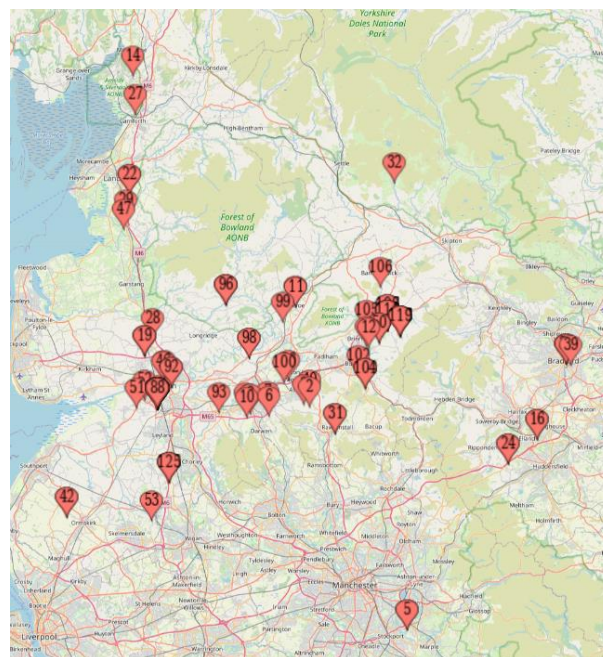
OVERALL ACTIVITY

Activities	Overall Target	Progress to date (Feb 2023)	Progress to target
Safeguard 9 jobs (3.7FTE)	9	9	Achieved
Create five jobs	5	5	Achieved
Create 4FTE	4	4	Achieved
Micro-tree nurseries	3	3	Achieved
Trees sown (grown)	4000	4500	OVER Achieved
Health walks	80	83	OVER Achieved
Volunteer hours	3000	3932	OVER Achieved
People trained in ecological & conservation skills	75	179	OVER Achieved
Schools and communities engaged	20	27	OVER Achieved
Number of people engaged (not volunteering)		2298	
Community litter picks	10	15	OVER Achieved

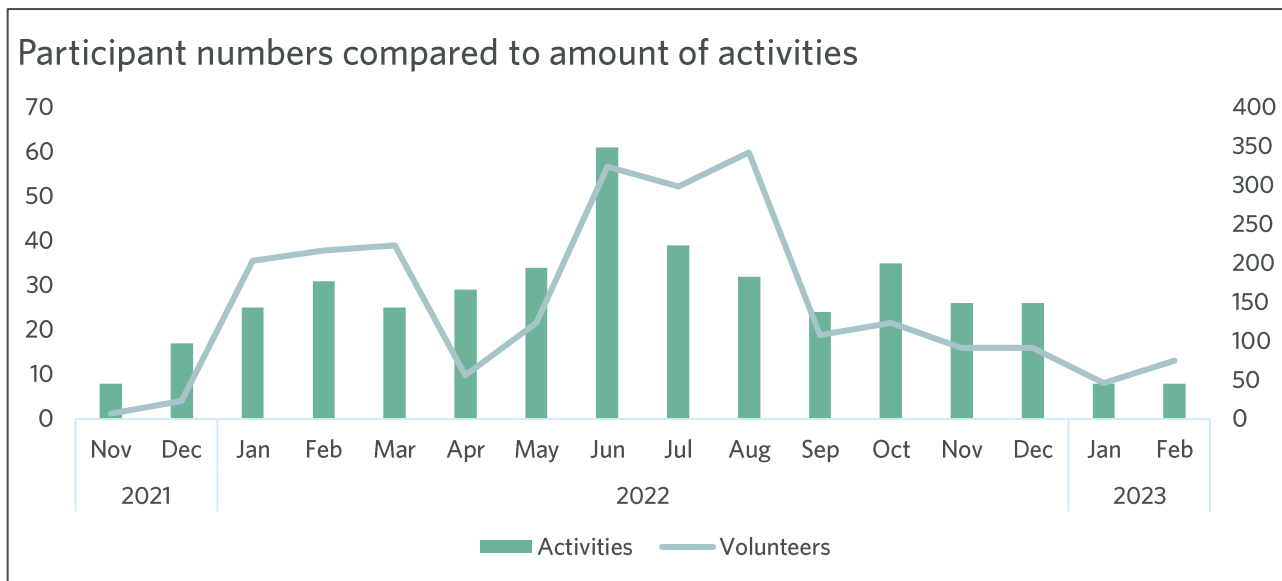
The HEAL project has overachieved on many of its targets for delivery. It has sown many more trees than originally expected, and over achieved on volunteer hours by almost 25%. It has provided more health walks, and engaged more schools than planned. It has significantly overachieved on training, more than doubling its target.

Although there were no targets to reach people in a wider way, rather than through dedicated volunteering, the HEAL project has reached more than 2,000 people through its engagement and outreach programme.

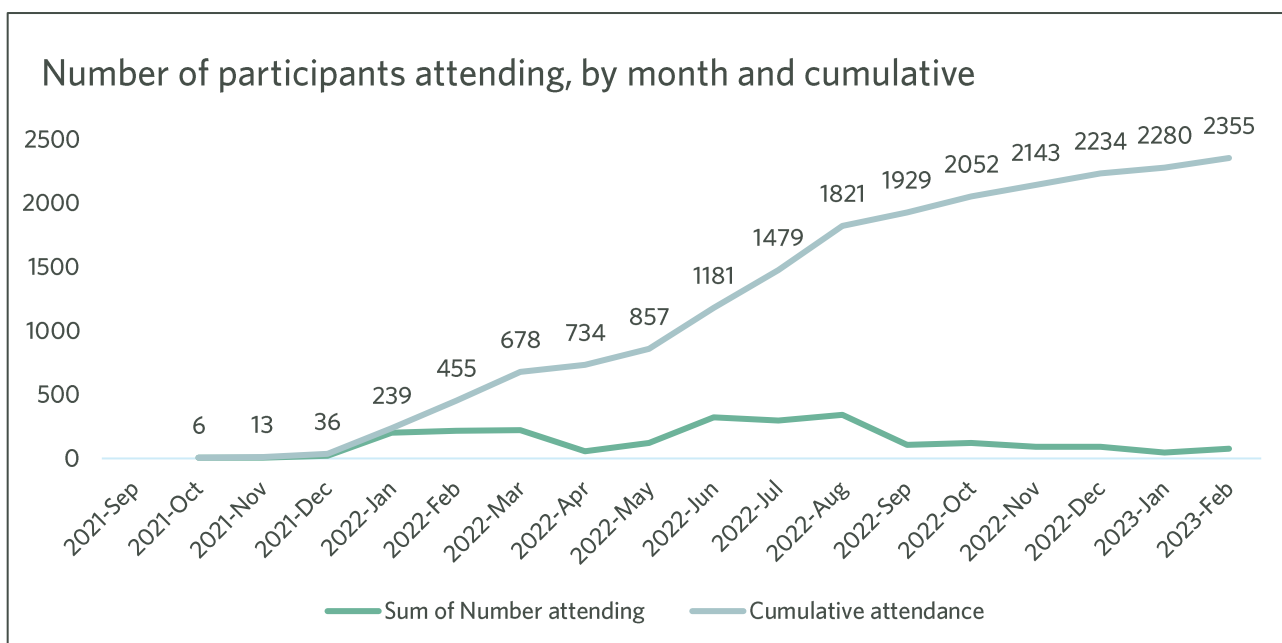
Activity has taken place across a wide range of areas. The map, (right) is based on 90 matched postcodes across the activities included in HEAL.



The project kept detailed records throughout, noting the number of attendees by the date that they attended. This allowed The Evaluator to look for seasonal patterns in attendance both monthly and cumulatively.



We saw that the summer months had the greatest number of activities, particularly in June 2022. Activities were popular during the summer months, possibly as families looked for things to do during the summer holidays, but then in September (when schools return) the numbers drop off sharply. There was also a spike in numbers in January 2022 which maintained for three months, could this be related to people making New Years Resolutions to 'give back' or get outside more?



Looking at participation over time, it is clear that the project took a small amount of time to get going, but then worked steadily to reach people over the whole project lifetime.

It was evident that the project team worked hard to reach new people. For example, residents living on the periphery of Peel Park in Accrington were involved in the project. One volunteer commented that **"I live locally and saw it on a notice board and had seen the flyer"**. This information is updated and maintained by the HEAL project officer for Peel Park, Robert, who also lives in close proximity to the park.

Other volunteers informed The Evaluator that they had been drawn to volunteering for the project by an advert in the County Job Service website, the local Colne newspaper, as well as the Eco-fest that Prospects hosted in the Accrington Town Square last summer and is due to be repeated again this summer. The Prospects Charity Manager explained, **“Last summer we held an Eco-fest in Accrington Town Square and it was absolutely fantastic! We had about 20+ store holders all environmental organisations. So that was a big recruitment opportunity for us. We’re holding another one this year”**. With this site-based project so close to the Accrington Town Centre, an Eco-fest to promote and share progress on the project with local people was definitely a success and also an opportunity to display partnerships.

A member of the project team who works in Hyndburn but lives in Pendle, felt she had seen the project as a resident too and she commented, **“I feel like there is a shift in communications, putting more information out about volunteering and seen some opportunities advertised and even a poster around ash dieback”**.

The project distinguishes between activities, which are related to project tasks, and people and capital works, which relate to the work on sites and nature.

	Overall Target	Progress to date (Feb 2023)	Progress to target
Capital Works			
Woodlands (number)	17	16	In progress
Woodlands (hectares)	45	21	In progress
Number of trees planted	55000	23496	In progress
Wetlands (number)	1	1	Achieved
Km river habitat enhanced	3	4.4	Achieved
Conserve / manage heathland (ha)	15	15	Achieved
Conserve / manage wildflower meadow (ha)	2	1.4	In progress
Conserve / manage woodland (ha)	5	5	Achieved
Access Improvement Projects (number)	2	1	In progress
Access Improvement Projects (metres)	800	450	In progress

Although the project has achieved its number of woodlands target, the number of hectares is still in progress. Woodland Officer, Bethany, explained there were some delays in delivery because of staff changes and there was a legal change - a change in the guidance of dealing with wading birds which had an impact on timing for the project.

There were also some delays due to finding consultants but that meant there was a chance to get some surveys done for next year. This has meant the team needed to pivot, as delays to activities in the woodland had an impact on volunteer opportunities. Luckily the team were flexible and had back up plans, as Rob the volunteer supervisor explained, **“we did do other things”** he said.

In terms of overall targets **“With the extra month we are now likely to overachieve,”** explained Harvey, as the project has been granted a short extension to the project.

The Woodlands Officer for the Wyre Rivers Trust explained that **“Farmers are really keen to have woodlands, particularly ones that are fenced”** and another member of the project team commented on the connection with farmers: **“We already had good links with the farming community, we had projects ready”**. This positive connection was thought to have helped to facilitate delivery on this aspect of the HEAL project.

The project has worked closely with farmers. Across four farms, HEAL has planted an average of 2,290 trees per farm and created 2,456 meters of fencing. Planting trees provides many benefits to farms as they can provide shelter and shade for livestock which improves the health and wellbeing of the animals, as well as creating windbreaks, preventing soil erosion and has some benefit in offsetting carbon emissions.²

The Woodlands Officer, Sam, explained how the project has been able to connect with farmers through nature. Farmers are seeing environmental work as a solution to less income from EU grants... **“Some of them seem quite excited,”** he said, and noted that there seems to be a change in the psyche and that now is a time of transition for farmers.

Thomas Myerscough, The General Manager at Wyre River Trust, said, **“We can do a good job of connecting people with nature, particularly farmers as they are engaged in the day-to-day stresses, and we can help them to step back. They often then talk about how nature has changed since they were younger and there is a moment when they realise what the farming system has pushed them into”**. He went on to add that that can be a challenging moment for farmers, and supporting them in that time is vital, adding, **“having the funding to do something about it is really important”**.

Farmers were able to see impact during the project which really helped. For example, the HEAL team carried out a fish survey in one area and originally there were 174 fish and around 70% were a common species, but after the project’s intervention there were 400 fish from a lot of different species. This really helped the farmers as they were excited to see quick wins and factual results.

These changes can be quite emotional to witness. Thomas recalled one farmer saying, **“we used to have loads of owls... then we got a farm cat.... Then the owls disappeared,”** and he described seeing the moment he realised the two were linked as the farm cat caught the food the owls used to eat. Luckily, this project is supporting farmers during these moments of transition and enabling them to focus on what they can achieve in future.

The project team also worked hard to engage young people and build the future generation of conservationists.

They worked with schools from some of the most deprived areas in the UK and have skewed their activity towards more urban schools, trying to reach young people who are more removed from green spaces.

² <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/1816/benefits-of-trees-on-livestock-farms.pdf>

Schools		Number of Children Engaged	Percentage on Free School Meals (FSM)
Griffin Park Primary	Water + Wellness	30	31%
Marsden Community Primary	Water + Wellness	210	16%
Shadsworth Junior	Water + Wellness	60	51%
St Aidan's CE Primary	Water + Wellness	30	36%
St Anthony's RC Primary	Water + Wellness	60	39%
St John Southworth RC Primary	Water + Wellness	30	33%
St Luke & St Philip's CE Primary	Water + Wellness	29	50%
St Michael's & St John's	Rivers in classrooms	80	13%
Appley Bridge Primary School	Tree planting	34	4%
Peel Park Primary School	Tree planting	22	40%
Witton Park Academy	STEM careers	20	33%
St Clare's Catholic Primary School (Preston)	Rivers in classrooms	36	7%
Wensley Fold Primary Academy (Blackburn)	Rivers in classrooms	30	11%
St Bartholemew's Primary (Gt Harwood)	Rivers in classrooms	30	25%
Freckleton Primary School	Rivers in classrooms	26	14%
Longshaw Junior School (Blackburn)	Rivers in classrooms	30	54%
St Joseph's Primary School (Darwen)	Rivers in classrooms	24	20%
Eldon Primary School (Preston)	Rivers in classrooms	30	37%

On average, UK schools have 23% of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM)³, but the average pupils on FSM involved in this project is 29% which is significantly higher. All the shaded schools in the table above have more deprived pupils than the UK average.

The team have not just reached young people but expanded their offer to include wellbeing. Community Projects and Activities Officer at RRT, Helen, mentioned how RRT had started to add mindfulness activities into their education sessions; encouraging time to reflect, letting young people listen to what they could hear, and getting the pupils talking about how that made them feel.

³ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>



PARTNERSHIPS

The HEAL project excelled at forging partnerships to maximise the delivery of project, whether it was the local council for a small corner of a park to create a tree nursery, or a community charity to deliver on the conservation and engagement of local people.

The benefits of engaging partners are diverse and can include inspiring new ideas, sharing their experience, providing essential insights based on their expertise, increase the capacity to deliver, helping to reach new or difficult audiences as well as creating a wider network of connections and understanding for all the partners concerned⁴. It is evident in the project that RRT maximised the benefit of engaging partners.

⁴ <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/partnership-working/partnership-working-principles>

A FOCUS ON THE PROSPECTS FOUNDATION: A DELIVERY PARTNER

As Hyndburn's community-owned environmental charity, this foundation describes its mission as follows: "To be the key movement in Hyndburn for environmental sustainability and to use our collective knowledge, skills, work and experience to secure this for current and future generations"⁵.

— “

Harvey, Deputy Chief Executive, RRT

“We've delivered some great changes.”



Prospect's values as an organisation resonate well with the HEAL project's aims, and focus on the collaboration of the local community and the environment for the benefit of both the present and futures of local people and the environment in aims such as collectively reducing carbon footprints and promoting environmental sustainability. With such similarities in aims and desirable outcomes, it is clear that a partnership between the HEAL project and Prospects would be a positive collaboration.

In speaking with the Charity Manager, Alison Silver, she confirmed the areas of collaboration with the HEAL project, **“Our project was about looking after grassland, heathland and woodland; running 12 health walks and setting up a tree nursery which we have done at Tinker Brook at Oswaldtwistle, so 5 outputs for our part of the HEAL project”**.

Volunteer engagement was very much a success of this project overall: **“We have about 200 volunteers in total – some dip in and out and we're quite relaxed with our volunteers – we tell them what the activity is and they can turn up if they want to. We try and have a variety of activities”**, commented Alison.

In discussing volunteer recruitment, Alison commented, **“The whole Prospects team are involved and we actively pursue all the time. It's easier here because its site based so local volunteers choose to volunteer here”**.

— “

Alison Silver, Prospects Charity Manager

“It's been a really lovely project – it's so nice for us to be site based. To be able to concentrate on one site and make such significant improvements; it's been lovely really.”

The Eco-fest in summer of 2022 hosted by Prospects was valuable in volunteer recruitment and it also served to promote the HEAL project events and to share the progress that the project had made.



⁵ <https://prospectsfoundation.org.uk/our-mission-and-values/>

Case study

Peel Park and the Coppice Local Nature Reserve

This site is clear evidence of the project's impact on both nature and local people.

Peel Park and the Coppice Local Nature Reserve is situated on the eastern edge of Accrington in East Lancashire and is a very extensive and varied site, including woodland, heathland, grassland and mill lodges from the industrial legacy of the town. It is an area rich in habitat diversity.

It is noted for its excellent access from both the town centre of Accrington and residential areas, and the heathland is one of the most accessible areas of heathland in the County due to the network of improved footpaths. The reserve is accessible to most abilities despite its elevated position, due to a network of woodland paths which lead the visitors to the summit.

RRT has worked in partnership with the Prospect Foundation to deliver the HEAL project on this site, and the work and its impact can be seen as clear evidence of good collaboration benefitting nature, conservation, and the people from the local community.

Over and above the specific conservation aims for this site, the project and its volunteers engaged in dry walling sessions to restore dry walls, as well as litter-picking, clearing and cutting back vegetation from paths and using wood from Larch trees felled onsite to restore and create new benches and bird boxes.

Volunteer Quote

— “

“It gives back to the local community by enhancing green spaces for relaxation.”

” —

The Pleck Meadow environmental renewal project in Accrington's Peel Park⁶.

Pleck Meadow is located on the area of grassland near Arden Hall and the Coppice Nature Reserve and was acquired by Hyndburn Council in 2018. Prior to 2018, this land was under private ownership. Although it was possible to navigate around this strip of land to access each side of the Peel Park, it created a divide which was only passable by means of a muddy path on a steep incline.

The authority developed a masterplan to enhance the area for both the public and wildlife with the creation of the new pathway. This was done in partnership with The Prospects Foundation and Ribble Rivers Trust who co-ordinated the grant funding for the project and the wetland creation.

LNR Project Officer Robert met with volunteers to the project at the park every Monday at 10am. Commenting on this weekly arrangement a recently retired volunteer believed that his involvement in the project had **“Put structure back into my life and got me out again”**.

During this time with volunteers, they carried out an array of conservation activities across the site including: dry stone walling, tree thinning, planting plugs, chopping saplings, litter picking, scything on the meadow, removing invasion species such as rhododendrons, bramble clearing on the heathland

⁶ <https://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/23399785.accrington-footsteps-mark-new-urban-nature-reserve/>

("wearing double gloves"), training courses, woodland surveying, invertebrate surveying, moss id walk, butterfly transects, and training on grassland condition assessments for volunteers and staff.

The Evaluator visited the site and spoke to volunteers, who told us that drystone walling and Himalayan Balsam pulling were among their favourite activities!

— “

HEAL Volunteer Quote

"It's opened my eyes to aspects [of nature], one step at a time."



Robert commented that, "there's a wide variety of stuff to do," on site, thus appealing to a broad range of volunteers. Contributing to the conversation, a volunteer who preferred more physical activities such as stonewalling rather than identifying plant species, commented that, "I'm

more hands-on and get stuck in!".

Robert was meticulous in maintaining an up-to-date notice board in the park, advertising what activities were being run in the park as well as on social media. This improved local engagement in the park with one volunteer commenting, "I live locally and saw it on a notice board and had seen the flyer".

Benefitting nature: Wild-flower planting and meadow creation

Robert explained that, "before there was no path through it and the grass had been growing for about 5 years so it was very thatchy but it did have quite a good diversity of flowers".

Consequently, the grassland was cut to remove nutrients and increase native wildflower diversity and invasive species of plants such as the Himalayan Balsam and Montbretia were removed.

A green hay transfer was made from Slate Pits Meadow, a meadow already rich in wildflower diversity and the volunteers spread the hay by hand. One volunteer commented on the hay, "There was a lot!".

Additionally, Robert commented, "We did some wildflower plug planting and some seed sowing".

— “

Robert, Project Officer

"The scope of the project has been really good and the amount of positive feedback was nice."



Most of the work developing the meadow was done in the winter, explained Robert, but commenting in Spring, "Now it's ready to bloom". There was a sense of positive anticipation amongst the volunteers on site that early Spring day.

Benefitting nature and the local community: A wetland was created

A member of the project team explained that “There was an issue of water coming off the hill which created lots of erosion, the idea was to capture the water and hold it on the hill. There is now a pipe under the path and it will hold the water in the three wetland areas.”

The Pleck Brook which traverses the length of the land was prone to flooding, causing problems for housing at the lower end of the park. The solution to the flooding was explained by Robert, “RRT have helped with the design of these wetlands so they work as natural flood management to slow water down the site and hopefully prevent flooding of the brook”.

The three wetland areas were created where it is hoped that amphibian life might develop habitats in the future. Additionally, the benefit of flood management will positively impact on the local community living on the perimeter of the park near the brook.

The future benefits for local people as well as conservation was expressed by a member of the project team: “Pleck Meadows benefitted pollinators as wetland is good for amphibians and dragonflies which are very charismatic species which people can recognise and care about”.

Benefitting nature: Woodland creation and enhancement

To enhance and create woodland in the park, the project facilitated:

- Infected Ash trees with dieback were removed and replaced with 116 trees with some assistance from St. Christopher’s Secondary School, local to Accrington.
- Himalayan Balsam and Rhododendron, both invasive species, were removed.
- Cowslip and Bluebells were planted and relocated.
- Thinning of Larch trees to benefit native Oak trees.
- With the help of LWT, volunteers were trained to conduct Woodland Condition Assessments. A volunteer who was involved in this assessment commented: “Brilliant training that meshes it all together” which enabled a couple of volunteers to work together and independently on woodland assessment and timber volume survey and went on to comment that during this survey, “we learnt from each other too”.

Benefitting local people: Footpath creation to create a nature connection

The Prospects Foundation and Ribble Rivers Trust co-ordinated the grant funding for the creation of a new footpath which has been incorporated into the existing network to connect Arden Hall and Hodder Street to link with Peel Park via the wetland. The pathway also includes a bridge over the Pleck brook and has vastly improved accessibility to the newly created meadow and wetland as well as making both sides of the park better connected.

The path which had been widened and had the surface improved is now accessible to mobility scooters and prams. Volunteers on site noted that the path was being used more and more frequently by visitors to the park.

On the 10th March 2023, a celebration event was held to mark the official opening of the Pleck Meadow which brought together Hyndburn Council, the charities and children from the St Anne's and St Joseph's RC Primary School and Benjamin Hargreaves C of E Primary School. Inaugurating the event was Cllr Abdul Khan, who cut the ribbon on the new nature walk. According to the Lancashire

Telegraph he said, "I am certain the opening of this space will be a great way to encourage locals to enjoy the natural spaces on their doorstep."

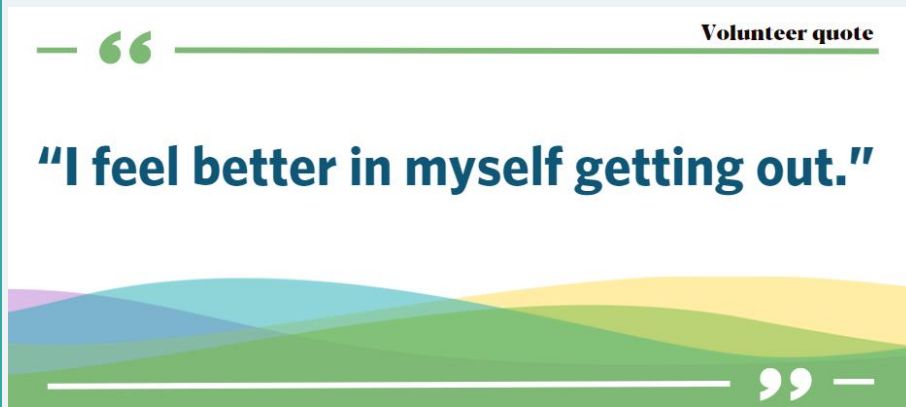
In the same newspaper article, a Prospects Foundation spokesman said: "The project has been a labour of love from all our staff, as well as from the numerous volunteers that have given their time."

"Last week we had an opening walk with the new path ad partnered with local primary schools and mayor and getting a lot of press."

"The children were so excited and were given the opportunity to plant wildflowers" explained one staff member, and another added "The result will be a more biodiverse and accessible green space that people and wildlife such as bees, butterflies, and amphibians can enjoy."

Benefitting local people: Nature walks and health walks

One of the five ways to improved wellbeing is an improved personal connection to nature. A further way to improve wellbeing is to take notice of your surroundings.



Additionally, being physically active has been proven to improve wellbeing. Of the different health walks, a member of the project team commented that, "Some were rambles and some were quite informal. It is a steep site so it is good exercise". In an evaluation activity

conducted by The Evaluator on site, the volunteers were so enthusiastic about their improved levels of activity that 125% reported that they had felt the benefit. The Evaluator found that all these ways to improved wellbeing were facilitated at Peel Park though the HEAL projects nature walks and health walks.

With some help initially from RRT, Robert held twelve nature/health walks and events, including bee and butterfly walks and a moth night activity in the woodlands and a 'Not-so-creepy-crawly' family walk on Halloween! A volunteer who attended some of the walks commented that, "It's opened my eyes to notice more things", thus improving her connection to nature leading to possible improvement in her wellbeing.

Learning something new is also seen as a way to improved wellbeing and these nature walks served to inform as well as educate the attendees about conservation of badgers (a walk was held with the Lancashire Badger Group) as well as signs of seasonal change, butterflies and moths. Learning new facts about their immediate environment will have made a contribution towards the improved wellbeing of attendees.

Volunteer quote

— “

“It’s about helping the environment; you learn a lot and notice your surroundings more.”

” —

commented on this engagement, “First call who operate in the Arndale in Accrington have come along with the staff, they had a lot of remote workers and it was the first time they’d met some of their co-workers in person for some of them”.

Robert noted that it was more difficult getting people out in the cold but walks went ahead in the rain

A series of health walks were also co-ordinated in the park to encourage people to be out in nature and improve their wellbeing. A regular walking group was set up for a local organisation, First Call, who provide employment, housing and financial support to those in need. Robert

with Robert commenting on volunteer reaction, “They were all saying how refreshing it was!”.

There were many, many benefits of these walks which are likely not only to contribute to improved wellbeing of attendees but also to the conservation of the area as local residents are better informed.

Volunteer quote

— “

“It’s worth doing. You feel like you’ve achieved something and you’re helping your local environment.”

” —

Benefitting local people and nature: Learning new skills

One of the five means to improved wellbeing is ‘learning something new’ and this project didn’t disappoint passionate volunteers in this respect, one of whom has invested 21 years in voluntary conservation work!

Volunteers to the project were provided with opportunities to gain valuable conservation skills from experts in the field such as Grassland Condition Assessments, where training sessions were led by LWT. Subsequently, these assessments were conducted with the volunteers on site.

When questioned by The Evaluator about having learnt any new skills. A volunteer answered, **“Definitely! I’ve fully encompassed [embraced] every bit of training”.**

This project has allowed for a range of capacity building and skills development – from courses on water safety, to outdoor first aid and brush cutter training.

One of the walks groups accessed Walks Leader training, meaning that the walks on Thursdays will be able to continue after the end of this project.

Other training included: Priority Habitat Survey Training from the Freshwater Biological Association, hedge laying, dry stone walling, risk assessments, soil testing courses and moss identification.

‘An introduction to Scything’ was a course where volunteers were taught an eco-friendly way to cut vegetation. Robert explained why the team hosted scything training, **“[it] is a more natural way to manage a meadow”.**

Training increased volunteer awareness in the management of the site. It helped people who know it well to put some context in place as one volunteer who had lived next to the site for 17 years became a

— “

Volunteer quote

“It’s been all encompassing. We’ve got a proper project. We got the training and we can put that training to work.”

real advocate. This volunteer helped the neighbours to understand the context. “It’s not always what people want to see... we’ve been doing a lot of tree thinning and people see that and don’t like it, so it matters that they understand why we do it”.

” —

PART THREE: IMPACT

IMPACT ON PEOPLE

HEAL aimed to reach a wide range of people and has reached out to a number of groups to find people who are unlikely to have had much contact with nature projects, including: groups that work with young people, with people of different faiths and ethnicities, groups made up of disabled individuals, those whose members are older, and some more traditional green and nature-based groups. Volunteers came from all walks of life as the table below shows where volunteers were recruited:

HEAL Volunteers were recruited from a wide range of places including the following groups:	
Green Lancaster	A partnership between Lancaster University and the Students’ Union devoted to engaging students, staff, and the local community in practical responses to the climate and ecological emergencies.
Tinker Brook CIC	Tinker Brook Support Services CIC is a daytime support service that delivers meaningful daytime activities to individuals with who live in Lancashire and surrounding areas. The majority of the individuals attending this group have complex physical disabilities and/ or learning disabilities.
10th Fulwood Scout Group	Scout group who aim to educate young people, through a value system based on the scout promise, to help build a better world where people are self-fulfilled physically, mentally and spiritually as individuals who play a constructive role in society. Scouts need to be aged 10 to 14 years old.
NEET group, Lytham	NEET is an acronym for Not in Education, Employment or Training, (NEET) and is used to measure 16-24 year olds who have not had a great start to adult life as they are not currently employed or studying.

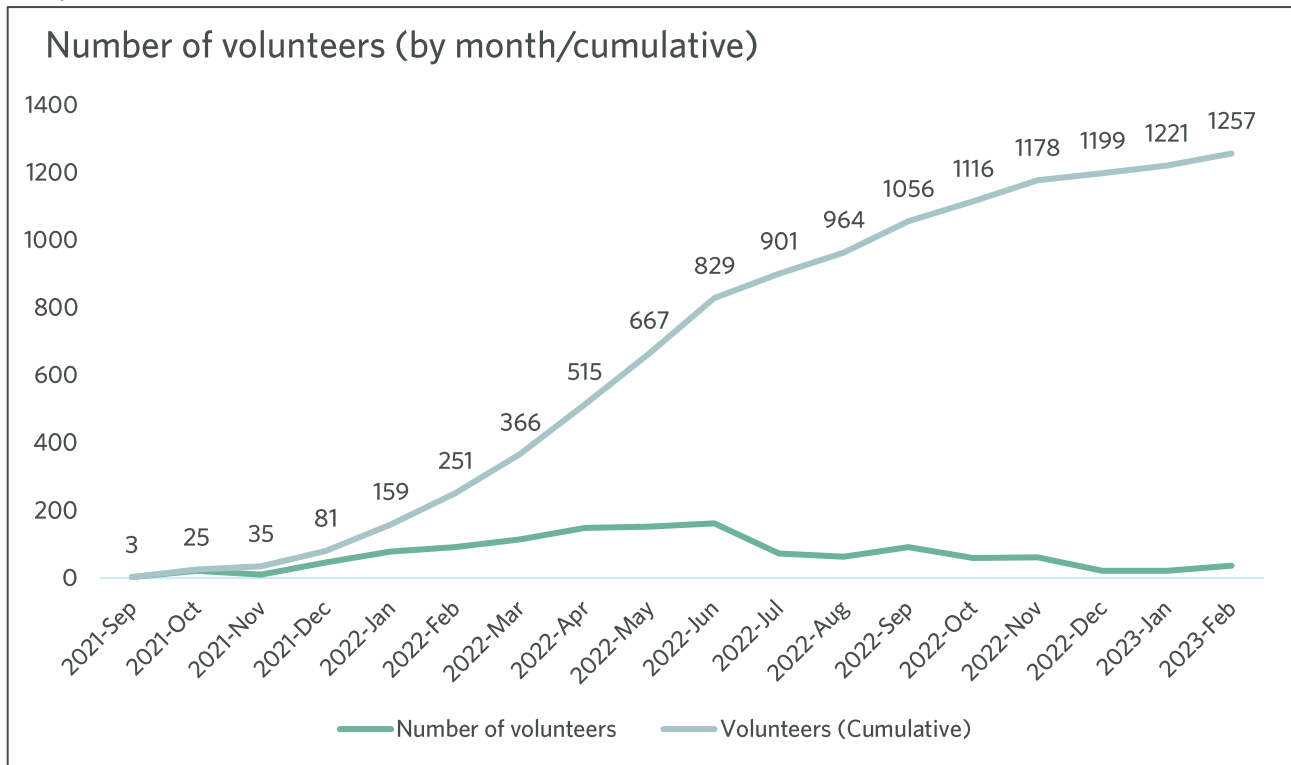
Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association	Ahmadiyya is an independent and empowered women's organisation who focus on autonomy, women leading women and working together empowering each other. All the women in this group are Muslim.
Burnley BID	A group of private sector led group of retailers and companies planning an £1million investment in additional promotion and marketing campaigns, enhanced safety initiatives, bigger and better events along with improvements that will make Burnley a cleaner, greener and a better place to shop, work and spend leisure time. Volunteers recruited through these groups tend to be people in full time employment, often missing from green volunteering schemes.
Friends of Avenham & Miller Parks	Friends of Avenham and Miller Parks work in partnership with Preston City Council. The group helps with park related projects as well as contributing to the management decisions and helping to raise funding for improvements and facilities.
Brindle WI	The Women's Institute (WI) is a community-based organisation for women. The WI tend to be based in more rural areas and tend to have an older female base with the average age of members estimated at 50 to 60 years old.
Barnoldswick WI	

Project staff described connecting with people they hadn't worked with before, after using data and evidence to identify need in new places. Having a regular presence, enabled by tree nurseries, rather than the previous peripatetic project lifestyle was a key part in making that happen. One staff member explained, **"For example we have worked with Asian Women's groups and groups from Nelson. "We have done quite a bit more in Pendle and now we have a base, has made a difference."**

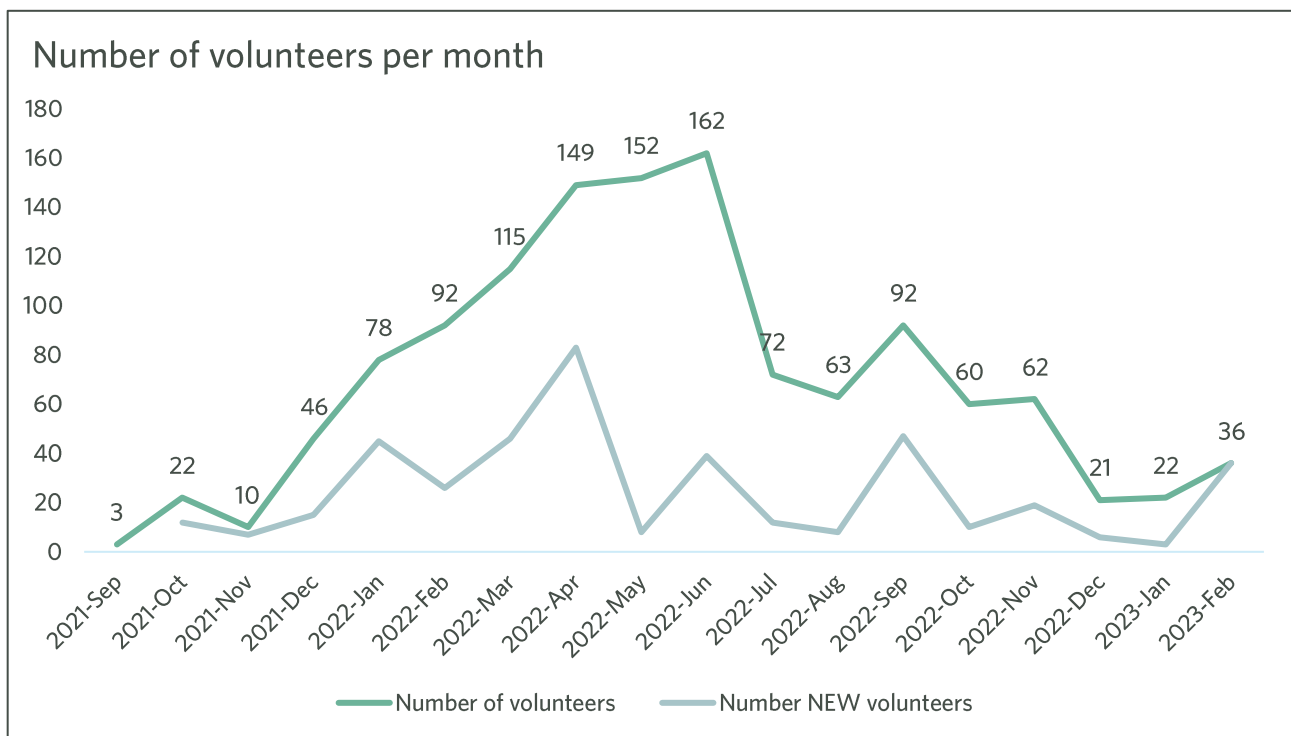
The fact that, **"people can go to the same place every week allows more people to get involved,"** provided an element of continuity and comfort, and meant the project could work with people who didn't have transport. Operating in more urban areas has helped the project to reach more people.



HEAL has spent a lot of time and energy building up its work with volunteers. In total, The Evaluator analysed 304 volunteer events.

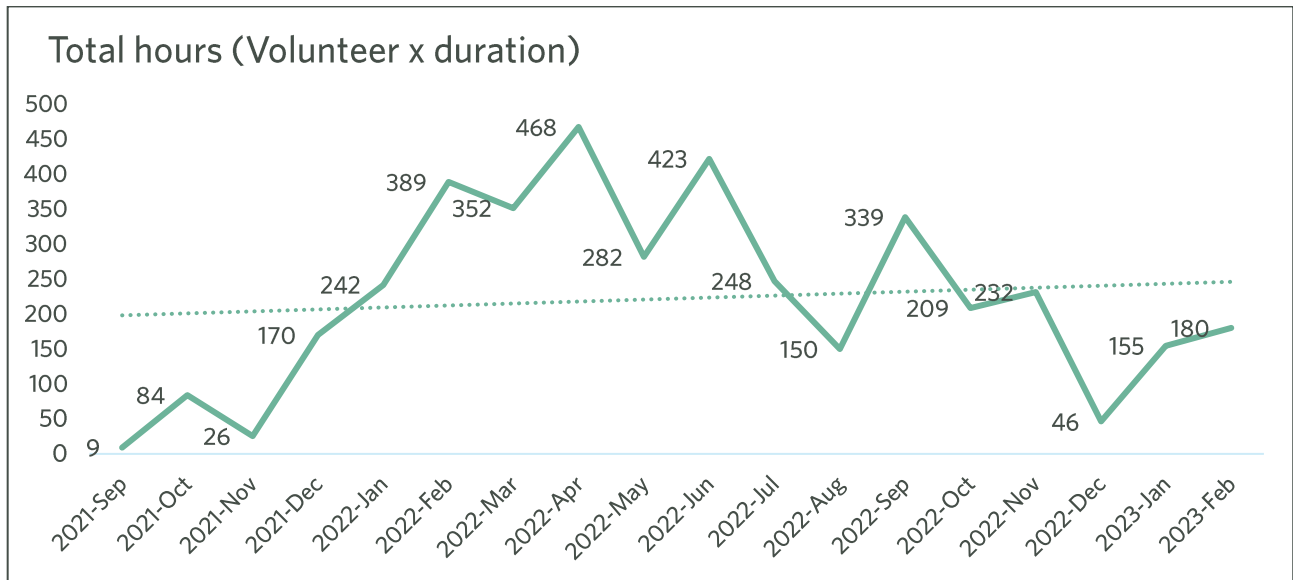


Projects always take a couple of months to ramp up to delivery, as teams have to be recruited, events planned and opportunities advertised, but HEAL quickly gained traction and achieved 1,257 volunteer attendances.



The graph above shows the number of new volunteers compared to the total volunteers. The project consistently attracted new volunteers throughout its duration and by the end of the analysis period had actually managed to cross the lines and run activities in February which attracted all new volunteers.

The volunteer activities show a spike in summer activities (likely due to the more attractive weather.) There is a good chance that the capacity building work in this project opening tree nurseries (which provide some shelter) will enable more winter activity to take place.



The graph above shows total hours of volunteering plotted by month. The dotted line shows the overall trend and this is increasing over time.



- Volunteer with 21 years of volunteering

“It’s been all encompassing. We’ve got a proper project. We got the training and we can put that training to work.”



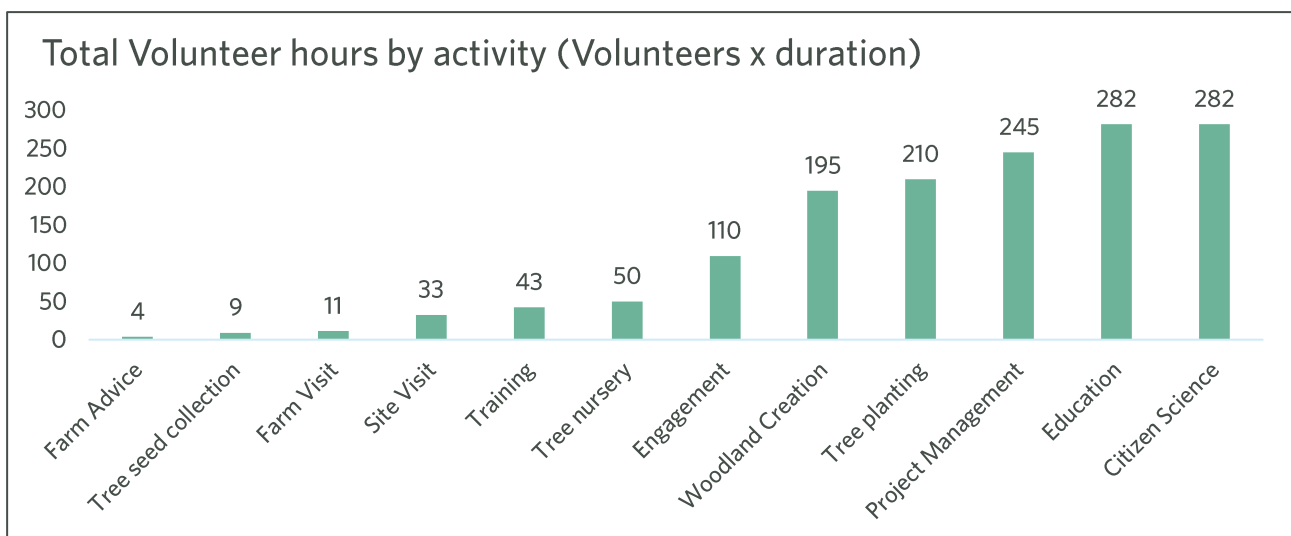
In total the project attracted 4,000 hours of volunteering. This can be valued at £80,000 based on National Lottery Heritage Fund guidance of volunteer time being worth £20 per hour.

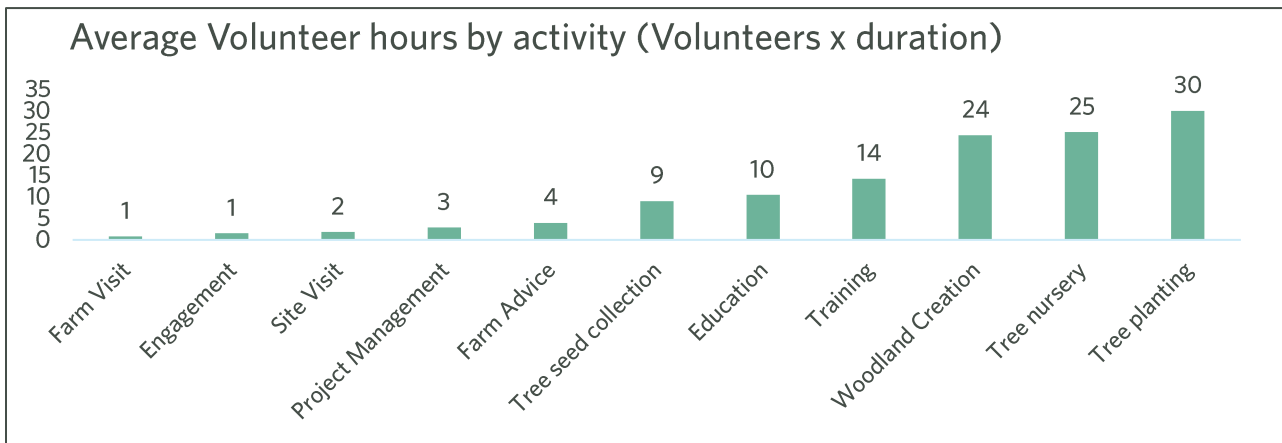
Volunteers took part in a wide range of activities, the word cloud to the right highlights the range with the most popular being shown as the largest words - health and trees!

Some volunteer activities were more popular than others, as the graph shows. Volunteers spent the least time on activities like visits and training, but a lot of dedicated time went on woodlands, tree planting and education.

There were three dedicated volunteers who took the lead on project management tasks. This highlights the importance of a wide skill range of volunteers, it's easy to think that the tasks volunteers can do must be simple or labourious, but having a committed team with trust can allow a project to really utilise the skillset of their volunteers.

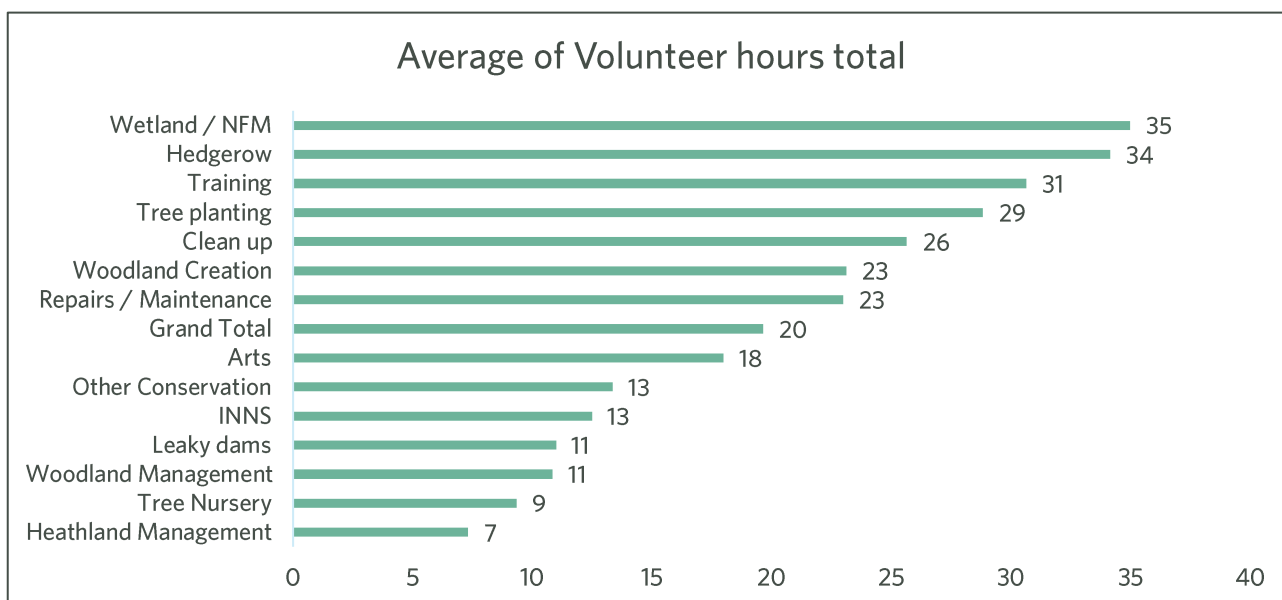
The most popular activities were a joint first place for both education activities and citizen science which clearly demonstrates a thirst for knowledge!





When it comes to average hours, tree planting was the most popular. This is not surprising given how many trees HEAL planted!

Volunteers spent time on a wide variety of activities:



The list of activities above were the most popular 15 activities. Other activities included: health walks, farm advice, workshop / event, farm / site survey, education, grassland management.

With the three Green Recovery Challenge Fund themes as the foundation of this project, the project team created an impact on nature, the local economy, and the community.



Case study

Marsden Park Community Tree Nursery

“This is a Pendle Council site”, explained Helen and is an example of the project working in partnership with councils across Hyndburn. In this case, the partnership site has cornered off a section for a tree nursery.



A volunteer explained that “The boundary was fenced off using chicken wire over from another project,” and was installed during a volunteer group event. There has been a focus on using repurposed materials on the site – pallets, plant pots, fencing. Helen has been surprised at the “lack of vandalism”

A group of six volunteers met every Wednesday evening last summer to develop the nursery and did this over around 8-10 weeks. A volunteer told The Evaluator that, “we have a WhatsApp group for the nursery” which volunteers found very helpful in keeping up to date and co-ordinating activities. The volunteer explained the difficulties of rodent control and also maintaining regular watering during last year’s hot and dry summer. The local fire brigade filled up the tank twice during last summer!

The HEAL project funded the capital expenditure on the shed to keep equipment, a water tank and the RRT staff time spent on seeding, mapping the ancient woodland (the source of the seeds) as well as time on site. Funding also included the spend on tools and materials.

Seeds were harvested from native species in ancient woodlands and there is hope that “this is an opportunity to replant the elm tree population in Northern England.” Helen explained that the process has “opened our eyes, bringing us back to nature and connection with seasonality” and that it was a “steep learning curve in processing the seeds”. Research had to be done into the different conditions required by the different species of tree. One variety even required that the seeds

were kept in the freezer for a time!



The seedlings are one year into their two-year growth period before they can be planted out in the Hyndburn area and Helen explained that it was important to put back the “right trees in the right places”.

It is thought that the English elm was likely introduced by our Bronze Age ancestors and mature trees grow to 30 metres and can live for more than 100 years. However, when Dutch elm disease swept through southern Britain in the 1960s and 70s, over 90% of elms were lost; an estimated 25 million trees. It has changed parts of the landscape forever⁷.

Elm trees provide a habitat to many birds, and some small mammals eat elm seeds and the leaves provide food for caterpillars of many moths, including the peppered, light emerald, and white-spotted pinion moths. Reintroducing these trees will allow for these creatures to flourish.

Benefitting the future success of these trees, the Woodlands Officer for the Wyre Rivers Trust informed The Evaluator that, **"We were gifted 3000 tree guards... worth almost £7k from the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust"**.

IMPACT ON NATURE

It was clear that there was an impact on nature across a number of areas – through building capacity through both creation of tree nurseries, green jobs and volunteer opportunities.

Tree nurseries have changed how the partnership will source trees. **"Now we have the infrastructure, we have interest and potential and it is quite marketable."** One of the team said. Fiona, Woodlands Officer, explained that **"We've started a small Lune River Trust nursery... HEAL inspired!"** In fact, tree nurseries have been particularly good for filling requirements of the small niche farmers, where people need smaller numbers of trees than the main suppliers allow.



Quote from a member of the project team

"Our tree nurseries are organic and sustainable... using peat-free composts and no pesticides"

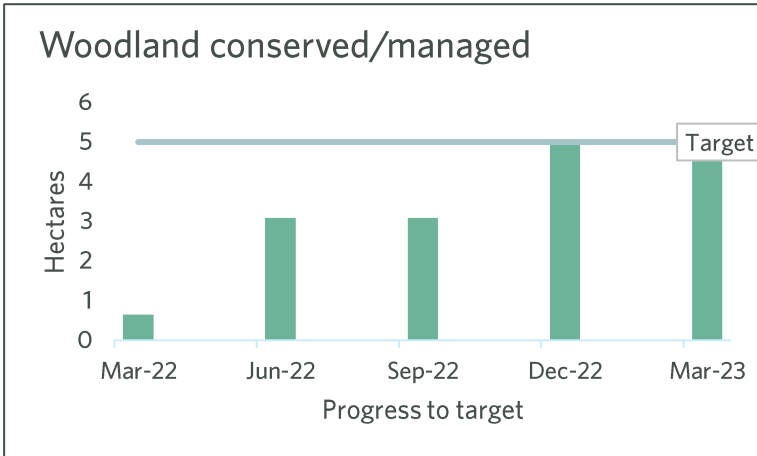


The tree nursery has allowed the project team to take risks, for example, one of the HEAL sites is being trialled completely plastic free. This is a risk, but knowing that the tree nursery can replace plants lost if needed has helped to give the confidence to do take these chances,

which will only benefit the environment if successful.

The tree nurseries have also helped to reach people who are not always keen or able to do physically demanding practical tasks. Sam, the Woodlands officer for Wyre River Trust, explained that he has a list of volunteers who **"find the practical tasks quite exhausting"** and this is a physically easier offer. The team have worked with Tinker Brook, an existing horticultural unit for people with learning disabilities who are **"people who wouldn't be able to get out on site"** due to their complex needs. They have enjoyed the process of growing things.

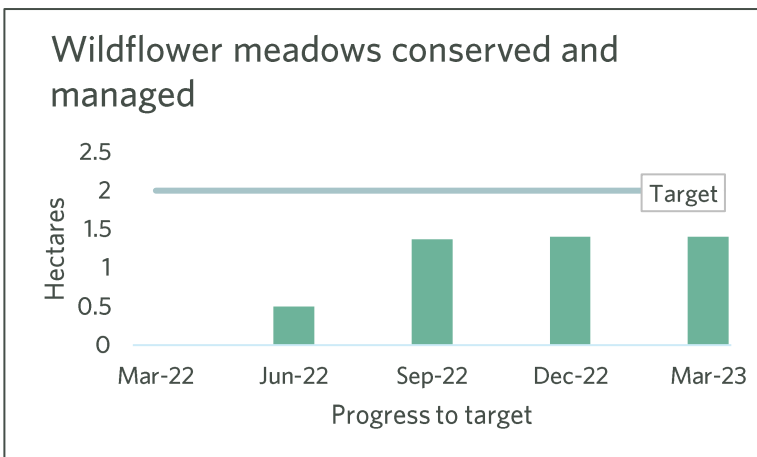
⁷ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/english-elm/>



The Woodlands officer for Wyre River Trust described creating four smallish woodlands which were all along rivers and streams and connected sites to each other. They'd also done a lot of hedgerows **“trying them without any spiral and plastics”** and using this work to **“evaluate our plastic use in the future.”**

The delivery targets for this part of the project were aspirational and given the timeframe, much has been achieved.

Although the targeted number of trees to be planted was lower than planned, the volunteer hours dedicated to the work in the tree nurseries, will impact on other areas, such as improved wellbeing for the volunteers as well as the legacy of the project.



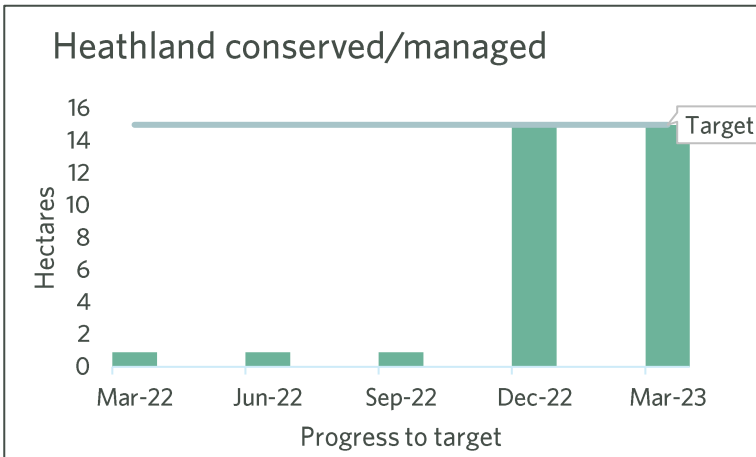
The project has faced challenges in hitting all its targets, but the team believe a small extension will enable them to over-achieve targets in the end. Some of the reasons for this are seasonal, as wildflower meadows can only be created in the milder months of the year.

Three tree nurseries (one in Lancaster, one in Marsden Park and one in Tinker Brook Support Services in Oswaldtwistle), will, in time, contribute to the impact that

the project has on planting new trees. It was explained to The Evaluator that saplings are typically planted out once they have reached two years maturity. With the duration of the project being eighteen months, the saplings are yet to reach the stage of planting out.

Through the partnership between Prospects and RRT, a micro tree nursery was set up at Tinker Brook Support Services. Up to 15,000 trees were grown from seeds collected from local ancient woodlands. Following sessions which Prospects ran with staff and visiting adults, the seeds were sown and nurtured by adults with learning difficulties. It was reported to The Evaluator while on a site visit in Peel Park that although the trees planted in the Tinker Brook nursery are currently too small to plant out, those trees will be planted in the Hyndburn area in the future.





The tree nursery at Marsden Park will contribute to the future of a native tree species in the area. Progress on heathland conservation was static and low until winter 2022 when the project team created a lot of impact in a short time.

In terms of ecological management overall, some of it is slow going, and may won't see results right away. **“For example, restoring heather will take time... we’ve set up systems to track progress; taking**

aerial photographs and measures of light at lower levels.” Robert explained.

Wetlands can be worked on year round, and slowing water down has been a focus for the HEAL project. For example, creating the wetland in Peck meadow: **“There was an issue of water coming off the hill which created lots of erosion, the idea was to capture the water and hold it on the hill. There is now a pipe under the path and it will hold the water in the three wetland areas.”** Explained one staff member. They continued to say, **“Pleck meadows benefitted pollinators as wetland is good for amphibians and dragonflies which are very charismatic species which people can recognise and care about.”** This fix for water speed will have an impact on people and wildlife,



The 5 Pathways to Nature Connection

Contact

Explore, take a closer look and get in touch with the natural world. Engage with nature through the senses for pleasure e.g. listening to birdsong, smelling wild flowers, watching the sunset.



Beauty

Take time to appreciate the beauty of Mother Nature. Engage with the aesthetic qualities e.g. appreciating natural scenery or connecting through the arts.



Meaning

Consider what nature means to you. Using natural symbolism (e.g. language and metaphors) to represent an idea, thinking about the meaning and signs of nature, e.g. the first swallow of summer.



Emotion

Find happiness and wonder. Find an emotional bond with, and love, for nature e.g. talking about, and reflecting on your feelings about nature.



Compassion

Think about what you could do for nature. Extending the self to include nature, leading to a moral and ethical concern e.g. making ethical product choices, concerned with animal welfare.



www.derby.ac.uk/blog/5-ways-closer-nature

PART FOUR: CONNECTING TO NATURE

The research conducted at the University started with two online surveys of engagement with nature activities structured around the nine values of the Biophilia Hypothesis. Edward O. Wilson introduced and popularised the Biophilia Hypothesis in 1984, which suggested that humans have a need to seek connection with nature and other forms of life.⁸

The five ways to wellbeing are simple steps to improving mental health. They can be interpreted in many ways and people do not need to commit to all five to see genuine benefits to their wellbeing. The HEAL project contains elements of all of the five ways, described as follows:



Connect

Making connections is one of the ways to wellbeing, connecting to nature and to other people. Through volunteering and taking people volunteers are gaining shared experiences to facilitate friendships, whilst feeling physical connections to nature by planting trees or maintaining nature. One staff member thought that people, **“had**

connected a bit more from a seasonal perspective as we have collected materials and seeds for the tree nurseries”



Be Active

Being active has so many benefits to wellbeing, through releasing endorphins from exercise, to improving people’s health and sleep.

Participating with HEAL has encouraged people to be more active, through walking to sites to actually getting down and engaging with nature, planting trees and clearing scrub. Fiona discussed working with

volunteers from an alcohol rehabilitation centre and how they were so keen to keep coming back. They really connected with being outdoors and being active.



Learn

As part of volunteering and participating, people learned new skills and information. Sam discussed tree planting and how volunteers had a lot of interest in the species they were planting and the ecology surrounding them. **“The volunteers are interested in ‘why’,”** he explained.



Take Notice

Taking notice is about slowing down, getting out of your own head and noticing the world around you. HEAL has encouraged people to have a break away from their routine and take notice of the nature and sites around them. Staff noticed how some people who had lived in the place a long time were excited to find new places to access through the

walks, and volunteers shared their favourite walks with others in the groups.

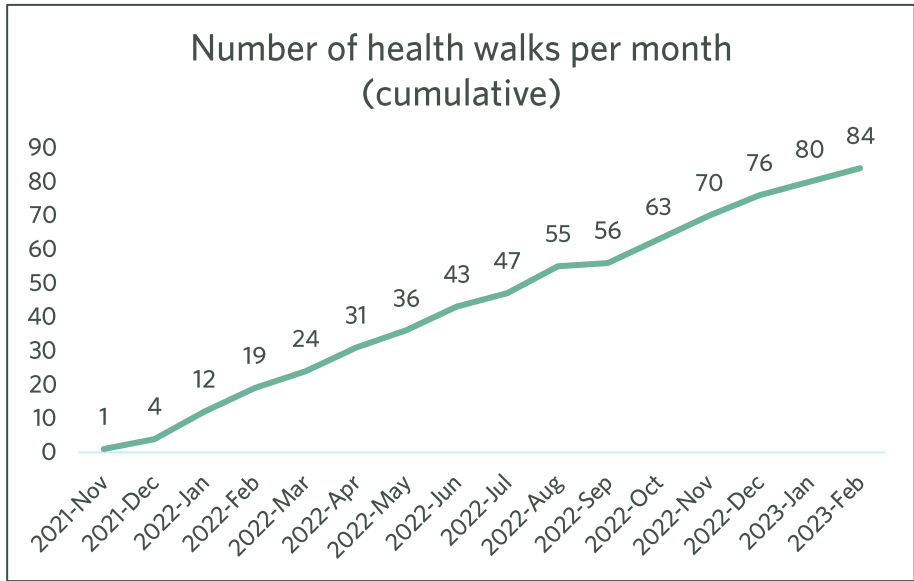


Give

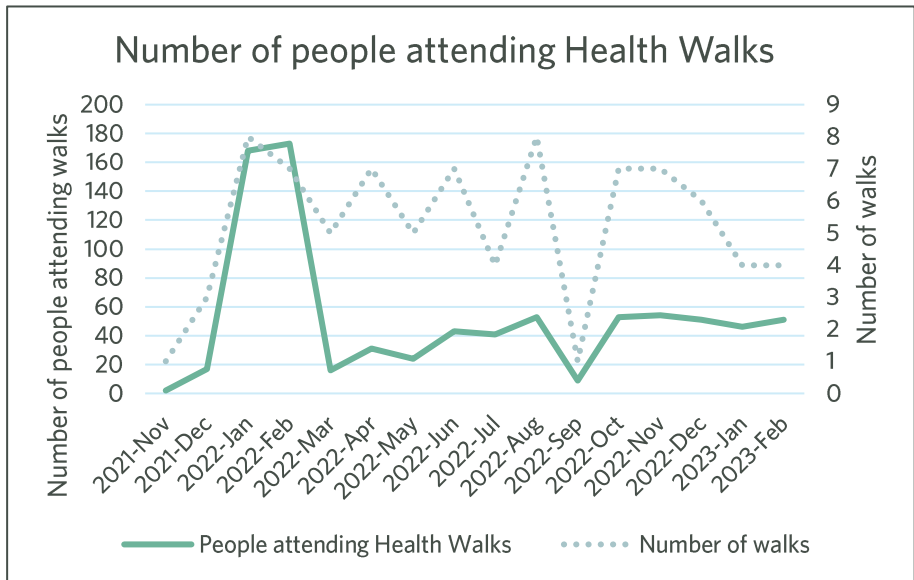
Staff noticed that volunteers felt much happier and wanted to come back at the end of sessions, **“it was the feeling of doing something worthwhile”** mentioned one of the staff. The act of giving something back, like time and labour to nature is a very positive feeling.

⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/science/biophilia-hypothesis>

Health walks have become an integral part of HEAL. The number of health walks has grown steadily over time. For most areas, Health walks were a new departure for the project teams, but Wyre council were already running a couple of health walks and the team made sure the walks they planned were filling gaps in either time or places and not duplicating an existing small offer.

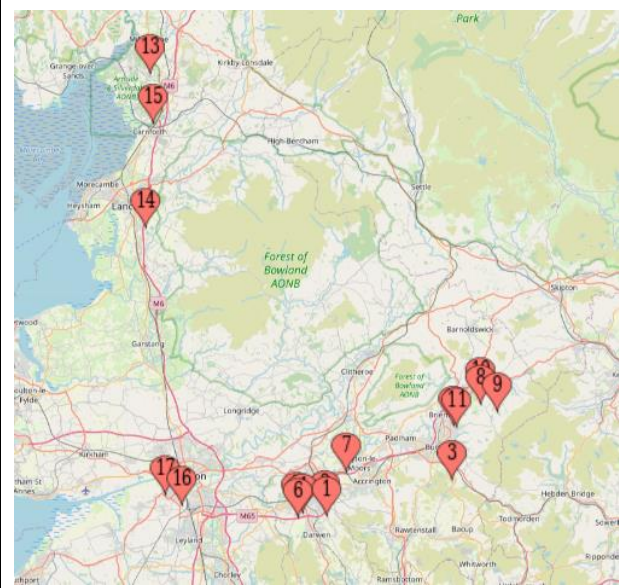
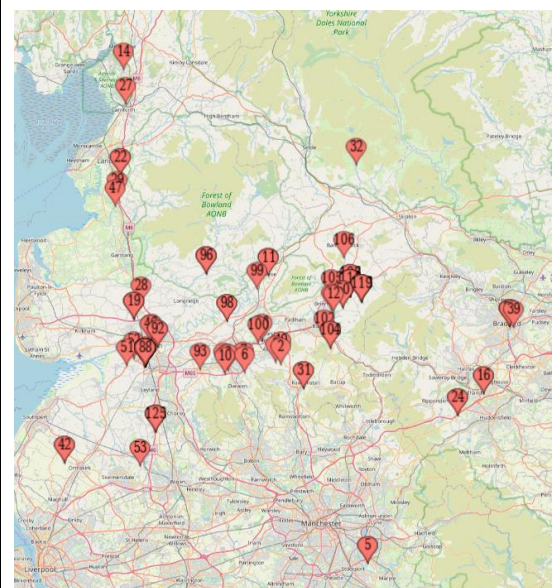


But the number of people attending saw large peaks in December, January and February 2022. Could this be linked to the weather? People being keener to get outside and more likely to do that on their own in summer but needing a push in winter? Or could the end of the pandemic restrictions have meant March 22 onwards saw a return to indoors activity?



Health walks took place in a number of locations, with most happening in Preston, 27 took place at Peel Park and 19 began at the tree nursery in Marsden Park. The other top locations included Colne and Lancaster. All these places are quite urban. In fact, the locations are much more easily accessible than the general volunteer programme, and evidently that has been part of the reasons for success.



Comparing all activity to health walks	
Map of health walks	Map of all activity
	

Following team reflection and discussion it appears that the health walks were a good first step activity designed to get people to make a small change.

People would give the team feedback at the end of the walks, sometimes saying they weren't confident enough to go for a walk themselves or that they struggled to find the motivation that they needed to go for a walk alone without the group. One person told Sam, that it was **"the highlight of my week"**.

Local Nature Reserve Project Officer, Robert had delivered around 12 health walks over around 12 months. Some were rambles and some were quite informal. As Robert was site based, all the health walks he delivered took part on Peel Park itself. It is a steep site so it is good exercise for anyone attending. He tried to make the walks appealing and used some quite creative methods to appeal to people. One example was a 'not-so-creepy-crawly' walk around Halloween time to get families hunting for bugs!

Some of the Health Walks were delivered to people who worked together, First Call who operate in the Arndale in Accrington came along with the staff for a team health walk. As they had a lot of remote workers, it was seen as a good way to get people moving around more, escaping their desks and for some of the people walking it was the first time they'd met some of their co-workers in person.

LNR Project Officer, Robert ran weekly walks in January to appeal to people wanting to get out. That was harder to market and attendance was slightly lower but he thought it was worth doing and good to get people out in the cold. Robert said in future he would plan a bit more flexibly to try and choose the milder days.

Woodlands Officer, Sam, would carefully plan the health walks, deciding in advance what he was going to talk about. He would often check locations and if possible would choose areas where HEAL had been working so he had something to discuss and then **"we'd go for a walk and I'd explain what we could see and why"**. He noticed how people would connect to the nature on the walks through asking lots of questions, noting that both tree species and foraging were both popular discussion topics.

CASE STUDY: WALKING FOR HEALTH IN AVENHAM PARK

Although health walks were held at various locations, the walk in Avenham Park, Preston, showed the most success in participant numbers and number of walks. The Community Projects and Activities Officer for RRT, Helen, explained that the area had been selected due to statistical evidence that there was need for improved health and wellbeing in the area and the Ribble River runs along the one perimeter of the park. It is central to Preston and easily accessible.

“I’ve been leading the health walks in Avenham Park in Preston on Monday mornings and it’s been really nice to see the group form. We’ve had 18 months to grow and at the start it was slow but it’s been gaining momentum”, explained Helen. Speaking of the walk just the day before our meeting, **“Yesterday there were 16 people and they are quite a bonded social group so they see each other outside of their walks during the rest of their week and we’ve got a WhatsApp group and they share local news such as road closures”.**

Discussing a participant in the walking group, Helen commented, **“There’s another lady who’s been widowed and doesn’t feel safe walking in parks on her own but in a group, she feels like it’s the ideal opportunity to get out. A new person might come to meet new people and be quite quiet initially and then the next time they come everyone says hello by name”,** indicating that the group is confident and welcoming. **“For some of them is having a purpose and more of a routine and a reason to leave the house”,** said Helen, **“You can see social bonds forming”.**

Away from the health walks the group have continued to forge friendships, **“They go to luncheon clubs together on a Tuesday. They’re carrying it on after we withdraw from the project”.** To facilitate the continuation of this group, five group members have been trained as group walk leaders and **“They will carry on without us”,** explained Helen.

Helen has noticed how some participants have grown in confidence, particularly those who have gone on to do the walker leader training, **“They feel more informed and confident to take on the role after training”,** she explained, **“There’s still a little bit of funding so I’ve been able to go on with my health walks just to help these newly trained volunteers settle into their roles”.**

Investment in the training of the group walk leaders will go a long way to ensuring that the health walks continue and was a great investment in the legacy of the project. Additionally, the participants have also started to embrace other nature-based activities in the park which will continue improve their connection with nature and each other. A couple of them have started volunteering in the park. **“One of the ladies that comes along is a volunteer in the park and runs a section called ‘The Rock Garden’ so a few have started going there on a Wednesday morning and helping with the gardening so that’s another skill booster”,** explained Helen.

In these health walks, there is clear evidence that participants engaged with several of the five ways to improved wellbeing. Helen saw people connecting with others and nature, being physically active; learning new skills (those trained as walk leaders and those engaging in gardening activities) and being present in the moment. All of which are inevitable when engaging in a group walk. For these reasons, the health walks in Avenham Park are certainly a notable success of the project.



GREEN JOBS

An important element of all Green Recovery Challenge Fund projects is providing green jobs. In HEAL the following jobs were safeguarded: Programme Manager, Project Manager, Project Officer, Prospect Project Manager, Engagement Officer, GIS Data and Evidence Manager, 2 FTE roles in Volunteer Supervisor and one Education Officer.

Five jobs were created, with roles including Assistant Project Officer, Lune River Trust Wetlands Project Officer (0.5 FTE) and Wyre River Trust Woodlands Project Officer (0.5 FTE), Prospects Project Officer and three Kickstart Conservation Trainees.

In response to a significant forecast rise in youth unemployment as a result of the pandemic, the Kickstart Scheme was launched by The Department of Works and Pensions in September 2020. Kickstart funded employers to create jobs for young people through high-quality six-month work placements aimed at those aged 16–24 who are on Universal Credit and are deemed to be at risk of long-term unemployment. The scheme closed in September 2022⁹.

Many of the roles have changed, especially for those who started on the kickstart programme. Bethany started as a Kickstarter in 2021 and has now been woodland officer for one year. David is now a volunteer supervisor and he also started as a Kickstarter role.

The Kickstart roles were heavily supported and all three individuals were looked after on a daily basis by existing volunteer supervisor, Rob. **“We were lucky as we go to see their individual skills and personalities and the six month role lead to some real responsibilities”** He explained. Working with local people was important to the team too and this was something the Kickstarters really appreciated. **“It opened the door to improving the place you’ve lived all your life.”** David said.

David, Bethany and Jay discussed how they had one-to-one coaching sessions and development which was very detailed and had helped them a lot in their early careers.

For those newer career roles based in the wider project team, they also received a lot of support to find their feet. Based at Lune River Trust, Woodlands Officer Fiona said, **“It’s been really useful to step into the officer role. I understand the process and working with all the different stakeholders”** and Wyre River Trust Woodlands Officer, Sam added **“Having a job where you see something through from start to finish is very satisfying.”**

Harvey concluded, **“I’ve really enjoyed seeing everyone come in and grow.”**

⁹ <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/employment-support-the-kickstart-scheme/>

Case study

Robert - Project Officer

Robert's role as the Local Nature Reserve Project Officer at Peel Park and the Coppice Local Nature Reserve Project was created through the HEAL project and he was employed by Prospects to deliver the plan for this site. He started this role in May 2022 in an assistant capacity but with changes in the structure within Prospects, he soon assumed the full role of Project Officer.

Robert is a local lad having grown up in the area immediate to Peel Park, attended school locally at Mount Carmel Roman Catholic High School followed by study at Hull University. Such was Robert's interest in the local area, that he chose Peel Park as the area to study for his final year project at university.

Robert was well qualified to work in the conservation sector with a relevant degree and passion about his work and the local area. Commenting on his role, Robert told The Evaluator, **"I've been able to learn a lot ... especially coming out of the pandemic as my Uni experience wasn't so practical" and "It's hard to get experience"**.

At the time of meeting Robert, he was 23 years old and this was his first job in the field. He explained to The Evaluator that he was, **"fresh out of Uni"** and felt very fortunate with his role. **"I will be able to get a job in future with the skills and experience that I've got through this role"**.

Commenting on this conservation role, Robert found that, **"it's been a very educative post,"** and, **"it has taught me a lot about how to do a job in this field"**.

Equally important for future employment, Robert commented on the transferrable skills that he has learned through his role as Project Officer. **"I feel confident leading a group. I enjoyed pointing things out to people that they'd never seen before... butterflies and moths... different wildflowers"**. He commented that he **"never planned to do that at Uni - they don't teach you"**. He has also learned about event delivery and planning. Robert generated a monthly poster, detailing activities each week at Peel and posted them on the noticeboards in the park. He also maintained a social media presence and kept the regular volunteers updated on the activities via email.

Commenting on his time in the HEAL project, Robert reflected that, **"people have been really supportive... my confidence massively developed"**. Robert felt fortunate that he had received further funding from Lancashire Wildlife Trust to continue in his current role until the end of the year.

Harvey, Deputy Chief Executive, RRT

“

"Most proud of the opportunities, particularly the opportunity to start a job in this sector."

”

CONCLUSIONS

In this evaluation, a web of connections created by the HEAL project were identified. These will benefit nature and people in the local communities not only for the duration of the project but will create a legacy of the HEAL project and positively impact projects to come.

Whilst on site at Peel Park and Marsden Park Community Tree Nursery, The Evaluator observed that local people had embraced this project and had taken ownership with an improved understanding of what's on their doorstep. Furthermore, it connected local people not only to nature but also to each other, and strength in numbers is one of the necessities for the legacy of such projects and conservation as a whole; promoting positive change for the local environment where they live.

One recommendation from The Evaluator is that future projects such as this could measure demographic characteristics and experiences of the volunteers more regularly and in a quantifiable manner. This would further assist in generating data which would be useful in future decision making.

Some of the activities piloted in this project will continue to have a life beyond the project, as Lune rivers trust and Wyre rivers trust both plan to continue offering health walks. Staff expressed desires to reach even more people, and Fiona from Lune River Trust discussed how she was keen, **“to expand to as many people as possible including refugees”**. Wyre River Trust had recently taken part in some training on working with ‘people living with dementia’ and planned to offer health walks to that group soon. Lune Rivers Trust even had a health-walker who has gone onto volunteer in conservation full time with a view to working in the sector. Woodlands Officer, Bethany was excited to work with children more in future, particularly those who come from more deprived areas and who, **“don't have the same access to green spaces”**.

The project helped the team to connect with people and have added a new element to their programming, wellbeing. RRT had built many connections, and new ways to connect with people. For example, Community Projects and Activities Officer, Helen described setting up WhatsApp groups so that volunteers were able to connect with each other more easily. Health walks were a clear success and connected with many people over time.

The team has built capacity and this has had wide ranging benefits for nature. **“Sam [at Wyre Rivers] Trust, Robert [at Prospects], and Fiona at Lune and the team at RRT who have been employed allowed all the partners to expand what they're doing,”** Harvey described. Adding that this has meant **“Quite a few woodlands have been urban sites and this has improved nature and raised awareness”**. On reflection Harvey continued by saying he was **“Most proud of the opportunities, particularly the opportunity to start a job in this sector.”** It was evident that having a bigger team and working in partnership made a big difference to impact – working collectively, collectively achieves more.

Thomas was pleased that the strengthened partnership has led to more partnership work attracting further funds. They had received £160k for Estuary Fish Surveys from the Championing Coastal Co-ordination Fund and had other partnership projects in the pipeline. Also, they built some new links with Preston Council. This was also mirrored in the East of Lancashire where the RRT team have built new relationships with Pendle council.

This partnership is likely to reap rewards for years to come, being more ecologically sensitive can be more affordable for councils. **“Going from grass deserts to something much more natural has lots of benefits for nature and less intensive management for local authorities.”** Harvey said.

The tree nurseries are a forward-thinking development to engage more people and provide organic trees for future projects too. Once matured, the saplings will be planted locally.

The green jobs created are a strong foundation for long future careers in this sector. They are an important bridge between studying and the real world of work. The Evaluator heard about transferrable skills learned including confidence leading a group, managing money and event planning. One project officer commented that these skills were not taught during their education.

Ultimately, HEAL has transformed nature spaces, as one partner noticed, **“Seeing what’s been done already to transform a piece of rough grassland... really looking forward to seeing the {next} transformation as this one will be quick and very visible”** and has transformed RRT’s future capability through adding **Health** knowledge and expertise to the organisation, while developing capacity to do more for the **Environment**, providing a vital improvement to **Action** in **Lancashire**.



ABOUT THE EVALUATOR

The Evaluator is a creative evaluation company who specialises in visual evaluation, and is committed to making evaluation enjoyable for participants, easy for staff and professionals to take part in. All of the work of The Evaluator is underpinned by easy to read, visual reports. The Evaluator says, 'We'll figure it out for you!'

This report was written by Bronwen Welch and Laura Poon, project officers at The Evaluator and by Kirsty Rose Parker, founder, and director.

The Evaluator was founded by Kirsty, an experienced project manager and evaluator, who previously specialised in arts, regeneration, and wellbeing projects. Kirsty has an educational background in Maths and Economics, which covered many statistical topics, leading to an MA Hons in Economics from the University of Edinburgh.

Kirsty has 16 years of charitable project management experience including working with artists and audiences, and 9 years' experience of arts development. She is trained in negotiation, motivational interviewing and 'social return on investment' and is passionate about helping organisations to run the most effective programmes they can.

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