



Nearby Nature is a participatory project grounded in the ethos of environmental visual art practices.

Introduction/Background

This project has been developed by Wexford Mental Health Association, HSE Health Promotion, Parable Garden's Education Centre and funded by Wexford County Council through the Creative Ireland Programme.

Participants explored their creativity and experienced the potential of local natural spaces to support their own wellbeing and that of their families and the wider community.

The creative process was influenced by the current research available on the benefits of nature on health and wellbeing.

Workshops took place in the early months of 2024 in a range of outdoor places in Enniscorthy, Wexford; Vinegar Hill, Promenade Walk, Borodale Woods, Peace Park and Green Space by the Swimming Pool.

The core team for Nearby Nature comprises:

Laura Ni Fhlaibhin, Visual Artist. Artistic Director for Nearby Nature. Paula Lowney, HSE Senior Health Promotion and Improvement Officer Wexford and Co-Director for Nearby Nature. Órla Bates, visual artist. Lead Artist for or Nearby Nature Workshops. Aislinn O Leary, Health Promotion & Improvement Officer Slaintecare Healthy Communities Wexford. Co-facilitator for Nearby Nature Workshops. Tom Gunning, Green Therapy Consultant, Parable Garden's Education Centre



Methods

The project provided the opportunity for participants to explore, through creative and experiential mediums, the potential that local natural spaces have to support their own wellbeing and that of their families and the wider community.

Nearby Nature Project consisted of three main phases:

Phase 1 - Co-development of the workshop series with community practitioners. Representatives from community, arts practitioners, health promotion officers and Green

Therapy Consultant, Tom Gunning, Parable Garden's Education Centre worked together to co-design the workshop series.

Phase 2 - Facilitation of a series of five site specific, participatory visual art workshops with group participants. These workshops were led by **Visual Artist - Orla Bates** and co-facilitated by **Health Promotion Officers, Aislinn O'Leary and Paula Lowney.**



The workshops took place in a range of outdoor sites to the accessible to the participant group, chosen for their particular ecologies, such as riverside, rock land, shingle shoreline, urban park etc.

The workshops functioned as an individual and collaborative exploration of some key aspects of nature for wellbeing using expanded ideas of drawing, utilising land art traditions, for example pattern making with

foraged local materials such as pebbles or leaves.

Each workshop was structure as follows:

Connect: Exercise for grounding and exploring through the senses. Explore Time to be still and noticed things we hadn't seen before.

Create: For example :blind drawing on large clipboards-using a variety of drawing mediums gave depth and colour to the pictures. Ephemeral Art-foraging for material, drawn to the diversity of plants in the nooks and crannies and pools.

Reflect: Time to note messages/learnings/observations to take into everyday life



Participant Reflections/Learning Nearby Nature Programme:

"Today was a great day during which I realised that I have to connect with nature more often. There was a reboot of thoughts and desires. During our meeting I understood that we don't need to rush to live."

"Sometimes we have to become a tree and just to stop and to be in the moment. Nature gives us peace, slows us down, relaxes and I let go of all bad thoughts and they just go away. Be in the moment. Nature is our healing."

"I am nature, we are one. We have to take energy from nature. This program is an opportunity to unite with nature, to get ease and happiness. Nature = Life = Future."

"I like it very much. Very clean and fresh air - inspire me. It was as if I had become one with nature, with trees, with grass, with water. My soul becomes nice and pure. Thank you a lot for this excursion, I really like it. I'm falling in love with nature and its beauty. We have to protect the environment."



The final workshop was held in the Parable Gardens Education Centre. Led by Tom Gunning this session provided further opportunity to explore the theories underpinning nature and wellbeing and was also celebration to mark the completion of the workshop series.

Phase 3 - The design of a series of sustainable wooden plaques- Wellbeing Signage Installations. The installations were designed and situated to serve as creative inspiration and as a momentary wellbeing support for passers-by. The artistic director, **Laura Ni Fhlaibhin** led the design, planning and installation of these markers centred on the workshop participants artistic and reflective outputs.



Results

Five Wellbeing Signage Installations in the community locations where the workshops were hosted, this provides an opportunity for sustained community engagement with the themes and key messages of the Nearby Nature Project, reaching beyond direct project participants.

The Wellbeing Signage Installations were engraved with the curated reflections from workshop participants alongside an created by workshop participants specifically inspired by that location.

'We are a part of nature and we can ask nature for help. When we are in nature you're re-turning home.'

'Fresh air and birdsong renew my strength and I feel 20 years younger. Don't stop and always move on.'

'We don't need to rush to live. Slow down. Breathe. Be in the moment.'

'Nature around us is an example of the cyclical nature of life. Something old that interferes with life needs to be let go. And then something new will appear that will make us happy.'

'I like to walk in the forest where the earth takes away things that don't serve us anymore.'

Practice Implications:

Nearby Nature offers both opportunity for active engagement of participants in creative nature based workshop but also the signage installations provide opportunity for sustainable community engagement with the theme on an ongoing basis.

Nearby Nature would be an easy to replicate programme, with the potential to Scale and adapt.

The Nearby Nature Project Final Report will detail the process, evaluation, learnings and recommendations of this pilot and making recommendations for future replication and scaling of the project.

Mental Health Promotion Related Policy:

This programme was inspired by the publication of the Connecting with Nature for Health and Wellbeing Authors: Caitriona Carlin, Gesche Kindermann, Easkey Britton, Martin Cormican, Christine Domegan, Mike Gormally and Diarmuid O'Donovan And the work of the Nature and Environment to Attain and Restore Health (NEAR Health)

Related policies include:

- National Biodiversity Action Plan
- Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity
- Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025
- National Physical Activity Plan
- Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health
- Policy for Everyone
- Connecting for Life
- Social Inclusion and Community
- Activation Programme



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For further information on the Nearby Nature Project contact

Paula Lowney, Senior Health Promotion Officer, Wexford Health Promotion Team
0872754752 paula.lowney@hse.ie