



**PWYLLGOR DIWYLLIANT, POBL A DATBLYGU SEFYDLIADOL
PEOPLE, ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CULTURE COMMITTEE**

DYDDIAD Y CYFARFOD: DATE OF MEETING:	27 May 2025
TEITL YR ADRODDIAD: TITLE OF REPORT:	Recovery in Nature Programme Evaluation
CYFARWYDDWR ARWEINIOL: LEAD DIRECTOR:	Lisa Gostling, Executive Director of Workforce and Organisational Development (W&OD) and Deputy Chief
SWYDDOG ADRODD: REPORTING OFFICER:	Suzanne Tarrant, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Head of the Staff Psychological Wellbeing Service

**Pwrpas yr Adroddiad (dewiswch fel yn addas)
Purpose of the Report (select as appropriate)**

Er Sicrwydd/For Assurance

**ADRODDIAD SCAA
SBAR REPORT**

Sefyllfa / Situation

The purpose of this report is to provide assurance that the Recovery in Nature Programme facilitated by the Staff Psychological Wellbeing Service is delivering an effective contribution to the mental health support available to staff as evidenced in evaluation, and to provide an update on plans for continued delivery of the programme in 2025.

Cefndir / Background

The Staff Psychological Wellbeing Service (SPWBS) provides a stepped model of care to contribute to a culture of wellbeing and resilience and support the mental health of staff. We recognise that a range of resource options are needed and preferred and that not everyone wants to access or can make good use of self-help, psychoeducation or one-to-one therapy. The evidence supporting nature-based therapies (links to research articles below) has developed considerably over recent years and our experience during the pandemic clearly showed a greater interest in and willingness to look to nature for more holistic mental health and wellbeing support.

[Nature-based outdoor activities for mental and physical health: Systematic review and meta-analysis - ScienceDirect](#)

[Nature-based interventions to promote health for people with stress-related illness: An integrative review - Johansson - 2022 - Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences - Wiley Online Library](#)

[Frontiers | The Potential for Outdoor Nature-Based Interventions in the Treatment and Prevention of Depression](#)

[Factors influencing the effectiveness of nature-based interventions \(NBIs\) aimed at improving mental health and wellbeing: An umbrella review - ScienceDirect](#)

The Recovery in Nature (RiN) programme was first delivered in 2022 with support from NHS Charities Together Stage 3: COVID-19 Recovery Funding. The funding was available over a period of two years of delivery, after which the programme has been funded internally within Hywel Dda University Health Board (HDUHB), drawing on existing staffing resources in the SPWBS.

Aims and Content of the Programme

The programme has been designed as a psychological intervention for work-related stress and burnout, and thus to improve mental health and reduce sickness absence. For some participants this may mean that they are able to avoid going on sick leave and for others that they are able to return to work more quickly and sustain a successful return to work following mental health related absence. Participants also learn new skills to enable them to sustain their own wellbeing, the programme thereby also contributing to a more proactive and preventative approach.

The key therapeutic components of the programme are:

- A focus on nature as a therapeutic ally (deepening our relationship with nature for mutual benefit and viewing a meaningful reconnection with nature as fundamental to our overall health and wellbeing)
- Psychoeducation to increase understanding of stress and burnout, the science behind the benefits of being with and in nature, and strategies to support improved mental health
- A carefully facilitated process of mindfully stepping back from work and busyness to reflect on self-care needs and develop a personalised recovery plan
- Establishing a safe group environment for sharing and connection to aid normalisation and address experiences of shame, loneliness and isolation.

The initial model was to offer a series of Ecotherapy Retreats for staff, with attendance on four consecutive Fridays at a woodland venue. Whilst this proved popular, staff feedback in 2022 on the need for a shorter experience due to the difficulties around release, led to the addition of a series of single Recovery in Nature Days from 2022 onwards.

The offer over the last 3 years has been:

- An Ecotherapy Retreat (of four Fridays each) in each of the three counties (3 per year)
- Two Recovery in Nature Days in each of the three counties (6 per year)

An application and screening process is in place for the Ecotherapy Retreats, enabling us to ensure that the therapeutic intervention is suitable for each person at that time. Clinical Risk Assessments are undertaken as needed prior to confirming participation and onwards referral or signposting is offered and supported should this be required.

Each event has two therapeutically trained facilitators and a maximum group size of 12 with a total capacity of the RiN programme each year of 108. The programme has been designed and is facilitated by the SPWBS Team, with external sessional input provided by a local artist for the Nature Art component within the Ecotherapy Retreat programme.

The process during each of the RiN Days and Ecotherapy Retreats flows through time for personal reflection, sharing in pairs or small groups as well as whole group discussions. There are also a series of carefully designed nature invitations as well as guided mindfulness activities and some educational input from the facilitators. The programme now provides a

workbook to participants to use during the RiN Days or Ecotherapy Retreats which includes key information to support the process as well as space for reflection.

The woodland venues have been carefully selected to provide accessibility, appropriate facilities as well as the sense of "being away". One venue has been paid for, but the others have been provided without charge thanks to the generosity of local partners (Jerry and Charlotte Roberson for Scolton South Woods near Haverfordwest and the University of Wales Trinity St David's for Cynefin near Carmarthen). An appropriate Risk Assessment and Emergency Procedure was drawn up for each event/venue/group, and there was a qualified Outdoor First Aid trained facilitator present at each event.

A follow-up framework was designed and delivered to provide post-retreat support as a means of sustaining gains and encouraging embedding of new behaviours into daily life:

- A series of emails to check in, serve as a reminder and offer a supplementary resource: these are sent weekly for four weeks and then monthly for three months (option to opt out if desired)
- A one-to-one appointment (online or in-person) is offered by the Retreat facilitators at four weeks post Retreat to check in and reflect on the personal Recovery Plan.

Whilst other programmes to support staff wellbeing in outdoor spaces have developed since the pandemic in England, the RiN Programme in HDdUHB remains unique as an employee wellbeing offering in NHS Wales.

The RiN programme contributes to the overarching Workforce and Organisational Development planning objectives for 2025/2026

- Foster a workplace culture of connection, appreciation and positivity, enabling our people to thrive
- Create a compassionate, inclusive and respectful experience for colleagues and patients

Asesiad / Assessment

Attendance

Year	No. Retreats	Attendees	No. RiN Days	Attendees	Total Attendees
2022	3	20	1	6	26
2023	4	28	5	38	66
2024	1*	8	6	56	64
	8	56	12	100	156

(*2 Ecotherapy Retreats were cancelled due to last minute withdrawals and insufficient numbers)

A rigorous evaluation framework was built into the RiN programme from the outset, providing the means to assess outcomes and impact. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilised, acknowledging the importance of clinically valid and reliable psychometric pre/post and follow up measurement as well as an understanding of participants experience.

The quantitative measures used were:

- Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation ([CORE-OM](#)), a 34-item questionnaire with four main domains: wellbeing, problems, functioning and risk
- Maslach's Burnout Inventory ([MBI](#)), a 22-item questionnaire designed to measure the three main components of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment
- The Inclusion of Nature in Self scale ([INS](#)), a single item question designed to measure the extent that individuals include nature as part of their identity (nature connectedness)
- Various rating scales formed part of the participant feedback form that was used either at the end of the day or on the final day. These questions were designed to enquire about different aspects of the participants' experience including the suitability of the venue, their sense of being away and the skill of the facilitators,

The qualitative measures used were:

- Thematic analysis of various free text questions within the participant feedback forms
- Use of the Most Significant Change approach ([MSC](#)), this was brought in as an additional layer in October 2024, drawing on participants' experience over all the years of delivery thus far (2022 – 2024)
- Verbatim quotes shared during the programme were also noted as a way of capturing personal experiences as they unfolded

Programme review process:

The SPWBS Team met at the end of each year's programme to review the evaluation data, consider participants' experience and reflect on their own experience of being involved. This time of reflection allowed for consideration of what was working well, what needed to change and other improvements to the overall programme. While some practical aspects were adjusted over time, the essential process and content of the programme remained the same, meaning that a comparison of outcomes was appropriate.

Key learning points were:

- Early and wide promotion to all areas and staff groups is essential to ensure sufficient numbers
- Mechanisms to support release of staff to attend are needed e.g. the Manager's Commitment Form, waiting lists for each event with cancelled places offered as quickly as possible
- Two facilitators are definitely needed to take care of the group process, manage one-to-ones as needed and to take care of all the practical arrangements
- Being involved in the facilitation is highly beneficial for SPWBS Team members in terms of providing role variety and deeply rewarding due to the significant sense of making a real difference in people's lives.

Constraints

The following factors have presented as challenges or limitations in the delivery and evaluation of the RiN programme:

1. Uncertainty around funding leading to delays in permissions with short time frames for planning, preparation and promotion
2. Difficulties for staff to be released in advance, attendance in work time dependent upon manager's permission with some managers more supportive than others and staffing levels variable across services

3. Cancellations at short notice due to difficulties around staff being released and unpredicted changes in staffing levels
4. Limited availability of venues that satisfactorily meet the criteria for the purpose of the programme
5. Provision of project management support, administration and facilitation from within the SPWBS Team, which is small and has been carrying vacancies, drawing resource away from other aspects of service delivery

Outcomes

1. CORE-OM

Paired sample t-tests were used to assess pre-post outcomes. These demonstrated clinically significant changes ($p < 0.001$) for all items combined as well as for the domains of Wellbeing, Functioning and Problems. This result suggests that over the period of time that participants attended an Ecotherapy Retreat, they experienced a clinically significant overall improvement in their mental health and functioning.

2. MBI

Paired sample t-tests were used to assess pre-post outcomes. These demonstrated clinically significant changes for Emotional Exhaustion (reduced) and Personal Accomplishment (increased). The change in Depersonalisation scores was not clinically significant. This result suggests that over the period of time that participants attended an Ecotherapy Retreat, they experienced an overall improvement in symptoms of burnout.

3. INS

A paired sample t-test was used to assess pre-post outcomes across both RiN Days and Ecotherapy Retreats. This demonstrated clinically significant changes ($p < 0.001$) suggesting that participants experienced a greater sense of nature connectedness following their involvement in the programme.

Participant feedback

Key themes from the feedback forms:

- Over 98% of participants reported that they would highly recommend the programme to colleagues
- All participants who responded in the follow-up feedback indicated that it had been very important for them to participate and that the programme should be available to all staff to support mental health
- All the participants indicated that they had been able to achieve their personal goals for attending to some extent, with around 65% saying they had achieved them a great deal or quite a bit
- Over 95% of participants indicated that following their event, they were spending more time in nature, engaging with nature more to support their wellbeing, and noticing and engaging more deeply with nature
- Over 90% of participants experienced the facilitation of the days and retreats as very good or exceptional and felt that their personal needs and wellbeing were well cared for
- Themes arising from what was found to be most helpful:
 - Being in Nature
 - Feeling not alone
 - Having practical exercises and strategies
 - Having time to slow down and be present
 - Learning about the science behind the benefits of nature connection

- Themes arising from what brought about the positive changes:
 - Reconnecting with or deepening relationships with nature
 - Slowing down and having time to be to reflect and connect
 - Increased self-awareness leading to greater kindness to self and improved self-care

Participant comments

"I found the experience very rewarding. Thank you for arranging such an amazing opportunity for staff. It makes me feel more valued."

"Extremely valuable, I think this has helped to give my work balance and meaning, I think I need to practice strong self-care as a prerequisite to caring for others"

"I thoroughly enjoyed and found great understanding and techniques to reflect on my burnout experience last year and ways to look to prevent this occurring again and manage my workload, including the associated stress and anxiety that comes from my demanding role. I had not taken part in anything like this previously and wasn't sure how I would feel about the reflective nature of the process, but I felt quickly at ease and encouraged to try out these new experiences in a safe place."

"A really valuable experience. Giving me a day for 'me' but also empowering me to use the different techniques in my day-to-day life."

"Today has been really restorative. I've been reminded how to relax, take time out outside, and what I used to enjoy doing. I've got a deeper appreciation of nature and wish to nurture it more and teach my son about it too."

"The scientific background was amazing and made me think of nature differently - in a good way!"

"It made me realise it was ok to prioritise nature and myself. I am making an effort to be in nature more and am already benefiting from it. I have taken colleagues on lunchtime walks and we are all benefiting"

Most Significant Change

An invitation to share a personal story of most significant change was sent out to all 156 participants in the RiN programme for 2022, 2023 and 2024. Stories were gathered from 18 participants and 7 of these were selected for sharing with a Story Selection Panel held on 28 January 2025. The panel chose 2 Most Significant Change stories, and both will be shared with the Committee today.

The stories are gathered using open questions:

1. What has changed for you because of taking part in the RiN programme?
2. Which is the most significant change for you and why?
3. What do you think brought about the change?

Initial analysis of themes shows the following:

- People have gained in both proactive, preventative ways as well as from seeking therapeutic support due to existing mental health concerns

- Re-connecting with nature is experienced as rewarding and valuable, and enabled by the sense of being given permission through sharing of the evidence base for the mental and physical health benefits of being with nature
- A high value is placed on knowing that you are not alone, that others struggle too and that it is okay and useful to share your own feelings and experience with others. The sense of stigma around not always coping is reduced through acknowledging the commonly shared experience of suffering
- Many gains were at an individual level, but participants also talked about wider impacts on family, friends, colleagues and others in the work setting. The changes were experienced as rippling outwards into workplaces and communities.

A full thematic analysis of all 18 stories is underway and will provide useful learning for the programme going forward.

Evaluation Summary

In summary, the evaluation of the Recovery in Nature Programme for staff clearly demonstrates clinically significant improvements in mental health, a reduction in symptoms of burnout and improvements in nature connectedness for participants. Qualitative feedback provides insight into the transformative impact of the programme, how much it is valued and the perception that it would be useful to offer on a more regular basis, to more staff.

Recovery in Nature programme for staff 2025

The RiN programme for 2025 repeats the 2024 plan with a series of six single Recovery in Nature Days (2 in each county) as well as three Ecotherapy Retreats (one in each county). This provides a maximum of 108 staff members the opportunity to participate. The content of the RiN Days and Ecotherapy Retreats remains consistent with previous years, but the workbooks provided for each have been improved and updated. Careful evaluation of the programme will continue, including Most Significant Change.

Previous experience has shown that early and extensive promotion is required to reach as many staff as possible with the offer and the enable forward planning around leave, rotas and service levels. In 2025, the RiN programme has been advertised as follows:

- SharePoint [Recovery in Nature for Staff 2025](#) (712 page views between 10 April and 5 May)
- Global email, regular Viva Engage posts, Staff Facebook page
- Within programmes, workshops and webinars the SPWBS team have offered
- Via various Teams channels
- Via key allied services and teams (Occupational Health, OD Relationship Managers, Wellbeing Champions, Union Representatives)
- Printable A4 posters to be shared in areas where staff have limited access to health board networks

As of 5 May 2025, 92 applications had already been received with four events (3 RiN Days and 1 Retreat) already being fully booked. This is by far the best response in the history of the programme and suggests greater staff awareness as well as a definite level of interest and need.

Argymhelliad / Recommendation

The People, Organisational Development & Culture Committee is requested to **TAKE ASSURANCE** that

- the Recovery in Nature programme for staff is making a significant contribution to supporting and improving the mental health of our staff and supporting recovery from work-related stress and burnout
- the programme offers a valued alternative to the other psychological services and offers of mental health support currently available
- the 2025 programme is well underway, drawing on learning from previous years and applying the same evaluation framework

Amcanion: (rhaid cwblhau)

Objectives: (must be completed)

Committee ToR Reference: Cyfeirnod Cylch Gorchwyl y Pwyllgor:	2.1 To provide assurance to the Board on compliance with legislation, guidance and best practice around the workforce and OD agenda, learning from work undertaken nationally and internationally, ensuring Hywel Dda University Health Board (the Health Board) is recognised as a leader in this field.
Cyfeirnod Cofrestr Risg Datix a Sgôr Cyfredol: Datix Risk Register Reference and Score:	N/A
Parthau Ansawdd: Domains of Quality Quality and Engagement Act (sharepoint.com)	2. Timely 3. Effective 4. Efficient
Galluogwyr Ansawdd: Enablers of Quality: Quality and Engagement Act (sharepoint.com)	6. All Apply
Amcanion Strategol y BIP: UHB Strategic Objectives:	1. Putting people at the heart of everything we do 3. Striving to deliver and develop excellent services 4. The best health and wellbeing for our individuals, families and communities
Amcanion Cynllunio Planning Objectives	1 Workforce Stabilisation
Amcanion Llesiant BIP: UHB Well-being Objectives: Hyperlink to HDdUHB Well-being Objectives Annual Report 2021-2022	4. Improve Population Health through prevention and early intervention, supporting people to live happy and healthy lives

Gwybodaeth Ychwanegol: Further Information:	
Ar sail tystiolaeth: Evidence Base:	Included in the body of the report
Rhestr Termau: Glossary of Terms:	Included in the body of the report
Partïon / Pwyllgorau â ymgynhorwyd ymlaen llaw y Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Pobl a Datblygu Sefydliadol: Parties / Committees consulted prior to People, Organisational Development & Culture Committee:	N/A

Effaith: (rhaid cwblhau) Impact: (must be completed)	
Ariannol / Gwerth am Arian: Financial / Service:	N/A
Ansawdd / Gofal Claf: Quality / Patient Care:	No direct impacts on adverse quality and/or patient care outcomes/impacts
Gweithlu: Workforce:	No direct impacts on adverse existing or future staffing impacts. Report for assurance only
Risg: Risk:	No direct impacts on risks identified and plans to mitigate risks.
Cyfreithiol: Legal:	No direct impacts on legal impacts or likelihood of legal challenge.
Enw Da: Reputational:	Unlikely to have any potential for political or media interest or public opposition:
Gyfrinachedd: Privacy:	No potential impact on individual's privacy rights or confidentiality and/or the potential for an information security risk due to the way in which information is being used/shared, etc.
Cydraddoldeb: Equality:	N/A