



# HOW TO HYGGE A TREE

Wellbeing at Westonbirt Arboretum



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**The National Arboretum, Westonbirt**  
Located in Gloucestershire, the arboretum is an internationally important tree collection and grade 1-registered landscape, with over 15,000 specimen trees and areas of semi-ancient native woodland. Planting started in the 1850s by Robert Holford, to whom the Westonbirt Estate belonged. Since 1956, the arboretum has been managed by the Forestry Commission

PHOTOGRAPH: PAUL BOX

# ABOUT THIS BOOK

**T**he aim of this book is to provide a resource that champions the importance of engaging with harder-to-reach community groups and what this brings to heritage organisations.

We want a resource that inspires other organisations to develop similar projects with community groups, that provides support through sharing best practice in a straightforward, practical and down-to-earth way.

We hope that this book captures the key ingredients in developing a successful community programme based on what we have learnt from the project.



## ABOUT THIS BOOK



## Community engagement & widening audiences

Attracting over 500,000 visitors a year, enabling the public to engage with the tree collection and develop an understanding of its care and conservation is a core part of Westonbirt Arboretum's mission statement. However, like many heritage sector sites, our audience demographic largely consisted of young families and retirees.

With Heritage Lottery Funding, the Westonbirt Project and Community Engagement Team have been able to

develop and deliver new activities to bring under-represented audiences to Westonbirt. Starting almost from scratch, over four years we have built up a successful programme of both on-site and off-site activities for young people and vulnerable adults.

We have worked with over 140 different groups and organisations and enabled almost 5,000 participants to get to know Westonbirt.



## Wellbeing at Westonbirt

Although our original targets for the community engagement project were focused on connecting people with trees, it quickly became apparent that our programme was having a profound effect on participants in terms of their wellbeing, mental health and quality of life.

### ABOUT THIS BOOK



Using the New Economics Foundation 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' criteria to measure the impact of the programme, participants have been able to articulate how they have benefited.

Participants have also repeatedly told us how the programmes have given them a special feeling and sense of belonging. That there is something about the combination of the site, its atmosphere and the experiences that our programmes provided, which has created something more than just a nice walk or new activity.

**At the National Arboretum, our mission statement is: "To connect people with trees to improve the quality of life"**

Exploring further into what this something could be, we discovered that the Danish concept of hygge perfectly encapsulated the thing we are doing.



## WHAT IS HYGGE?

Pronounced 'hoo-ga', and originally a Norwegian word meaning 'wellbeing', the concept of hygge is probably best summed up as:

'A deep sense of place and wellbeing; a feeling of friendship, warmth, contentment and peace with your immediate surroundings.'  
([danishweb.wordpress.com](http://danishweb.wordpress.com))



**TOGETHERNESS**

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**SHARING**

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**ENVIRONMENT & ATMOSPHERE**

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**THE HERE & NOW**

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**CREATIVITY**

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**FOOD & DRINK**

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**FIRE & WARMTH**

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**NATURE**

.....

**KEEP IT SIMPLE**





# TOGETHERNESS

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**Building relationships  
& shared memories**

## TOGETHERNESS



**T**ogetherness is an integral building block of hygge. We thrive best when connected with others and togetherness is about spending quality time with people who have a close connection with each other, whether that is family, friends or temporary acquaintances brought together through shared experiences.

Togetherness is about being a part of a group with whom we can share our worries and concerns, discoveries and achievements and who we can trust with both our physical and emotional wellbeing. Establishing a sense of togetherness with community group leaders, programme participants, and the volunteers supporting our work, enabled us to try new things, take risks and engage with new audiences who were initially wary of what we could offer and our ability to deliver it.

## Organisations & group leaders

At Westonbirt, we have a strong reputation for delivering high-quality formal education programmes. However, as relative newbies in engaging community groups, it was understandable that some community organisations were initially wary of our offer. What made us skilled practitioners in their areas of expertise?

Building a relationship of trust between ourselves and group leaders has taken time. Leaders were initially invited to the arboretum to meet with the Community Officers and be shown the site.

This enabled both parties to not only find out more about each other, share thoughts and ideas, aims and objectives, but also to get to know each other as people rather than organisations.

As people, we could accept each other's imperfections. It didn't matter if a group arrived an hour late or an activity didn't run exactly to plan. Together we could find a way to work it out, support each other and laugh about it afterwards.



## Volunteers

Where possible, we asked volunteers to cover a whole multi-visit programme. This enabled relationships of trust to be built with both participants and other volunteers and, as a result, the group created their own shared memories.

## Participants

We encouraged groups to take part in a multi-visit programme of activities – approximately six visits. This helped us establish a relationship and connection with participants. In particular, a relationship where participants felt they could trust us and each other to look after their physical and emotional wellbeing and that we were not going to set them up to fail, nor judge them.

Being part of a multi-visit programme meant participants could build a bank of shared memories and experiences, which helped connect the group together. Swapping recollections over the campfire about the time we didn't blanch the nettles in the nettle couscous sufficiently or when we were washed out on an overnight camp or tasting the cake we made – it was a good cake – helped bring groups of individuals who didn't all know each other together as a group of friends.

**“The community project has changed my life for the better in so many ways. Skills learnt, friends made, happy times and great experiences.”**

Community Team Volunteer



## Where in the world?

Reminiscing, sharing experiences and connecting together: suitable for dementia groups, care homes

### Resources

- UK map – if possible, large plastic-coated with dry wipe pens
- World map – if possible, large plastic-coated
- Optional – selection of up to eight photos of trees from around the world from your collection – for example, Japanese maple, magnolia, eucalyptus, monkey puzzle, Wellingtonia, common oak or ginkgo biloba

### Before the session

- Contact the group and ask them to find out where each participant was born or lived and bring information to the session in case participants need prompting

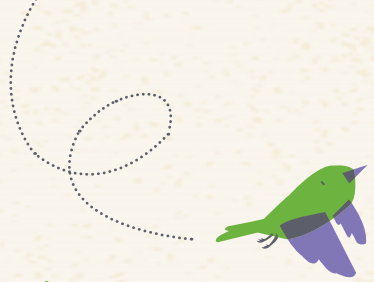
### Activity

1. Lay the two maps out in front of the group
2. Start by marking on the map where you grew up and find out if any of the group has been there
3. Go around the group, including all staff and volunteers, asking each participant where they grew up or have lived
4. Conversations usually start up quite naturally as participants discover shared experiences
5. Just as they have lived in many different parts of the world and are now living in the same home together, so our trees have come from

different parts of the world and are planted together in the arboretum

### Optional

- Select a few of the photos of trees from around the world and place on the world map to show their country of origin



## Collaborative poems

Building group cohesiveness through emotional responses to a shared experience: suitable for mindful, reflective groups, individuals coming together for the community programme

### Option 1

#### Resources

- Natural space
- Laminator
- Multi-surface pens
- Pressed leaves

#### Activity

1. Ask each person to find their own individual space
2. Spend five minutes being still and quiet, experiencing the environment
3. Write three words to represent the experience
4. Come back together in small groups of three to five people
5. Share the words chosen by each person and then decide together how to combine and present them to create a collaborative poem
6. Write poem onto pressed leaf, laminate and display

### Option 2

#### Resources

- Natural space
- Clipboard, paper and pen

#### Activity

1. Go for a walk through or sit and spend time in your natural space
2. Ask each participant to describe their key moment, emotion or sensory experience
3. Take elements from each person's description and write down on a separate piece of paper
4. Invite the group to decide on the order of the lines of the poem
5. Gather the group and either read the poem to them or ask the group to recite it together

The Arboretum in all its autumnal magnificence,  
Is magical, just wander and become enchanted.  
Boots disappear in crunchy drifts of orange, red and gold,  
Rustling whispers of the forgotten summer.  
Fungi erupts in profusion, a silent cacophony of colour  
With a chill in the air and the nights drawing in,  
It's the last splash of colour before winter arrives.

CREATED BY JILL, ALISON, JEAN, JOHN, NORMA, PAULINE AND SANDRA







## SHARING

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**Responsibility, learning,  
equality & harmony**

## SHARING

**H**ygge is also about developing an ethos of sharing. This can be something simple like sharing stories around the campfire or the biscuits at tea break.

Both of which can be powerful tools in bringing a group together. But it is much more than this.

On a wider scale, it is the sharing of responsibility and learning, and creating a sense of equality and harmony within the group through sharing of knowledge, experience and even mistakes.

As visitors to our site, participants on the community programmes were our guests, and as such we aimed to greet them with the same warm welcome we would give to a guest visiting our home. We wanted people to feel special and, ultimately, feel part of the Westonbirt family.

Breaking down formality took time. This partly went back to building trust and relationships between those of us delivering the programme and visiting organisations and participants, but it was definitely worth taking the time to do this.



## Sharing responsibility

A simple way we encouraged a sense of shared responsibility was by asking everyone to help unload kit and tidy away equipment before and after most sessions. Although, as professionals, we wanted to portray an image of being organised, planned and prepared by having everything set up ready, people wanted to be helpful.

For some, this was a role they were used to and could help place them in their comfort zone. For others, not giving them the responsibility of packing away tools or putting out the fire, could be disempowering and yet another situation where they felt they either couldn't be trusted to help or weren't deemed capable enough to help.

Sharing some of this responsibility not only meant an added safety check for everyone's wellbeing, but also boosted confidence as it became OK to remind someone older or more experienced of an important safety feature. However, as activity leaders, we had ultimate responsibility for the health and safety the group.



## Sharing learning

We accepted we were not the 'know-it-all experts,' here to pass on our wisdom to others and with nothing else left to learn ourselves. By encouraging group leaders and participants to share responsibility, they were often more keen to share learning from their own experience. As groups became more comfortable with us and the arboretum environment, they began to identify potential possibilities for new activities and helped shape the programme to meet the needs and interests of their group.

One comment we too often heard was: "Oh - we'll do whatever you think is best." Although we had an in-depth knowledge of the site and its tree collection, they had the in-depth knowledge about themselves and their group. By working together, we could create activities and resources that transformed a nice day out to a magical moment of personal discovery.



## Creating equality

At Westonbirt, we take the view that everyone is equal. Yes, tasks and activities needed to be adapted to match the needs of the group. Yes, we had the ultimate responsibility for the health, safety and wellbeing of the group. But we recognised that other people have equally valid views and ideas. They could take responsibility for their own actions and those of others and had a vast range of life experiences to draw on that we may not have had.

Working collaboratively on challenges that required an element of problem-solving, such as fire lighting, practical conservation or cooking (particularly when we had forgotten the weighing scales and tin opener), people could learn together, regardless of who they were.

Over time, people grew in confidence, developed a sense of camaraderie and began to feel at home among the group and wider arboretum.

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**"You can relax and be yourself and don't get judged."**

Young person



## Creating harmony

Finally, in any new group, people try to meet an unspoken standard of where they feel they should be in terms of ability, skill, knowledge and expertise. Working with groups with low self-esteem and/or high anxiety, participants needed to feel they wouldn't be judged on their lack of knowledge, nor there be a need to compete for our approval. Starting from a viewpoint that 'we already like you for being you,' we aimed to remove some of these concerns. By reassuring people that we all had to start somewhere and none of us were born with all the knowledge in the world, if things didn't work, we used the opportunity to explore the importance of resilience, patience and determination.

## Sensory quizzes

Sharing personal experiences and memories of the natural world: suitable for additional needs groups, youth groups, care homes, befriending groups, dementia groups



### Resources

#### Scent

- Either a set of cotton wool balls scented with tree-related essential oils in individual boxes, sets of image cards for the scents (pine, coconut, cocoa or lemon, etc)
- Or a selection of natural scented materials with image cards and/or scent vocabulary cards (Douglas fir needles, grand fir needles, western red cedar leaves, winter's bark leaves, winter's box flowers, wych hazel flowers, katsura leaves in autumn, etc)

#### Sound

- Either a set of audio recordings of woodland sounds, sets of photos representing each sound (deer, owl, wind, rain, bonfire, walking through leaves, hedgehog, etc)
- Or a selection of objects to represent woodland sounds hidden inside cloth bags (storm maker, rain stick, box of gravel, owl toy with call, robin toy with call, plastic and cellophane to make the sound of a bonfire, etc)

#### Texture

Set of feely bags of woodland materials with different textures

### Taste

- Oatcakes, set of different jams, jellies, honey and syrups (bramble jelly, rowan jelly, elderberry and blackberry jam, birch syrup, maple syrup, lime flower honey, horse chestnut honey, elderflower cordial, etc)

### Activity

1. Useful as an introduction to a session or as a filler activity to bring the group together and generate discussion between everyone – participants, staff, group leaders and volunteers
2. Give participants time to experience each scent, sound, texture or taste
3. Invite them to discuss their ideas about what each is, to select the image they think matches (if being used), and to share memories or experiences



## Qi sticks pairs meditation

Connecting with themselves and others around them: suitable for mental health and rehabilitation, groups with a mindful/reflective focus

### Resources

- Hazel rods: straight, approx. 20cm long, 1cm diameter. Important that when paired up they are same length and diameter as much as possible

### Activity

#### Briefly describe meditation:

- Concentrating on the 'now' not what has been or what might follow
- Your mind will drift – acknowledge the thought, note that it can be dealt with later, put it to one side and refocus on the 'now'
- Remember to breathe naturally

#### First stage:

1. Each participant has one stick
2. They find a partner to work with and stand facing each other. They suspend one stick between them on the ends of their index fingers, one person's left hand and the other's right hand, so the stick is held between them.

One person is elected leader. They make very slow small movements in whichever direction and pattern feels right

3. The partner follows (mirrors) the movement so that the stick does not drop
4. When it feels right, the other person takes over, without any explicit communication (just done by a change in energy). The roles can switch back and forth whenever it feels like it is happening

#### Second stage:

Two sticks – one on each index finger. Hands should move independently of each other. This forces an increase in concentration

#### Third stage:

Both participants close their eyes and repeat the above stages



## ENVIRONMENT & ATMOSPHERE

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**Creating a sense of familiarity  
& belonging, ownership  
& intrigue**

### ENVIRONMENT & ATMOSPHERE

**C**reating the right environment and atmosphere is a key factor in the success of a programme. As mentioned earlier, hygge is a feeling of contentment and peace with your immediate surroundings.

A visit to any new venue can be a nerve-wracking, disorientating and unsettling experience – even more so if you have anxiety, are on the autistic spectrum or have dementia.

At Westonbirt, we needed to factor in extreme weather, new activities and working outdoors away from modern conveniences. This could be overwhelming to the point of some participants either not attending or leaving early.





## Familiarity

We've all been on courses where the place you sit when you first enter the room becomes the place you sit for the rest of the week. That chair is your base. It's familiar. It's where you feel safe.

We recreated this sense of familiarity by establishing a group base, even a temporary one, that became home: somewhere participants felt emotionally safe as it became one of the few 'knowns' in a programme of unknown experiences and activities. Once people felt safe and in their comfort zones, we could start stretching their self-belief and confidence in what they could do.

We have found that for some groups that need repetition, such as participants on the autistic spectrum, having a familiar base for each visit provided enough emotional security to enable them to try more challenging activities.

A base provided a fixed point in a new and disorientating landscape. Knowing your way from the car park to base could provide the emotional security that, if things got too much, you could find your way back to the car. It allowed

a level of independence for some participants where having a familiar route from base to the toilets meant they could make their own way without fear of becoming lost. This was another important consideration for people on the autistic spectrum or with memory lapses.

## Belonging

Creating a base established a sense of belonging. Visiting high-profile sites such as The National Arboretum comes with unwritten social norms, which sometimes felt alien to participants on the community programmes. Having a base to call home created a sense of permanency and of being valued.

## Ownership

Over time, the base became decorated with different group creations and work, be it a woodland mobile or a neatly split pile of logs. This enabled participants to leave their mark and a memory of them as people, long after the programme had finished. The base became theirs, which they began to care for as their own, adapt it to their needs and take pride in sharing it with others.



**“This has given me the chance to sit with myself and feel safe. My heart and soul always feels restored after being here.”**

Group participant

## Woodland mobiles

Connecting with spaces, developing a sense of belonging: suitable for multi-visit youth groups and mental health and wellbeing groups

### Resources

- Selection of natural materials
- Hand drills or cordless drills
- Gloves
- Wooden beads (to act as stoppers)
- Fishing line
- Thick wooden slices to drill onto
- Forage baskets for groups collecting their own materials

### Activity

1. Show the group an example of a mobile
2. Optional forage walk to collect items
3. Decide on design by laying out items on table
4. Drill holes in items ready for threading
5. Thread items, tying knots as necessary and adding beads as stoppers
6. Either leave thread at top for hanging
7. Or, if using 'balance beam', find balance point for tying hanging thread



## Natural bunting

Creating a natural decoration for a shared base, developing a sense of belonging and ownership: suitable for multi-visit youth groups and mental health and wellbeing groups

### Resources

- Bunting triangles – wet strength tissue paper, cartridge paper or fabric
- Hole punches for paper or fabric
- String, ribbon or yarn
- Selection of fallen or pressed leaves or flowers
- Option 1: mud prints – mud, pot, water, stirrer, paintbrushes, punched fabric bunting triangles
- Option 2: leaf hammer prints – pin hammers, punched acid-free cartridge paper triangles, paper towel blotters
- Option 3: natural bunting – punched wet strength tissue paper triangles, 50:50 PVA to water mix, paintbrushes

### Activity

#### Option 1 – mud print bunting

1. Mix up mud and water into a thick mud paint
2. Paint onto back of leaves
3. Print onto fabric

#### Option 2 – leaf hammer bunting

1. Place leaf vein-side down on cartridge paper
2. Cover with two to three layers of kitchen paper
3. Hammer over the whole leaf
4. Carefully lift the leaf off to reveal your coloured print

#### Option 3 – natural bunting

1. Brush over wet strength tissue with 50:50 PVA to water mix
2. Add natural objects
3. Add another triangle of wet strength tissue
4. Completely brush over with 50:50 PVA to water mix
5. When dry, hold up to the light and the natural objects will easily be seen





## THE HERE & NOW

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**Don't rush, take it slow**

### THE HERE & NOW

Once upon a time, making a phone call meant waiting until after 6pm. Paying a bill required writing a cheque and popping it in the post. Nowadays, in our fast-paced, technological society, at the push of a button you can be connected instantaneously to the world and the world can be connected to you.

It can feel like there is no escape from the ever-increasing rush to play catch up. A text message demands an instant reply. Sit too long on an email and you will be bombarded with several more asking why you haven't responded to the first. While, in many cases this can be a positive, it also has a downside – you can never truly switch off.



PHOTOGRAPH: ETHAN DOW

Hygge is about slowing down and taking time to enjoy the moment. At the arboretum we're lucky to have limited mobile signal, so we can't check our phone messages every five minutes. That said, we still sometimes need to remember to be proactively inactive.

After spending an hour collecting wood and lighting a fire to boil the water, remember to take the time to savour the hot chocolate you've just made. After a busy morning coppicing hazel trees, take five minutes to soak up the sunshine, lie back and listen to the birdsong around you. Or even try calling the birds yourself and tune in to hear the distant reply.

Unlike formal education, our community groups rarely had a set curriculum to be delivered in a set time. Work could be delivered at a slower pace than normal, which allowed people to settle into the space and the activity, and discover their own levels of comfort and areas of learning they wanted to explore further.

As there was no set national curriculum to work through (sessions were still well planned out with clear learning outcomes, but that's different), we had the freedom to some extent to be led by the group. If an activity wasn't working for that group, we changed the activity. Likewise, if an activity was working really well, we didn't stop because the plan said it was time to move on. We enjoyed the moment and the impromptu learning.

It was about personal development not technical knowledge – although that was a common positive by-product!

Giving ourselves permission to deliver a slower-paced activity session gave the participants permission to ease up on themselves, make mistakes, find solutions and enjoy the process.

Being in the here and now also enabled us to focus on one activity at a time, enjoy the activity for what it was and use that activity as a form of mindfulness. In mental health work, occupation-focused practice, whereby participants take part in productive and meaningful tasks, is used to build self-esteem, confidence and independence. We regularly incorporated tool use into our community programmes, from draw knives for making shingles to a five-foot cross-cut saw for cutting logs. These required absolute concentration and focus on what we were doing, otherwise we risked making a mistake or causing an injury. There was no room for worry about outside concerns. We all had to be in the here and now.



**“It reinforced my opinion that if you take clients off-site to somewhere so beautiful, they can reach a level of peace which improves their ability to focus, engage in activities and learn new skills... They had the chance to become absorbed in a woodland setting, to improve their physical fitness, to take time and space to recover from stress.”**

Group Leader



## Whittling

Taking time to focus and be immersed in a mindful activity: suitable for youth groups, young carers, mental health and rehabilitation groups

### Resources

- Whittling knives
- Wood to whittle

### Activity

1. Demonstrate tool use and ask participants to identify risks and how to reduce them
2. Supervise safe use of tools at all times
3. Ensure blade cover is in place after use
4. Ensure 'blood bubble' around each participant – outstretch an arm and imagine drawing a circle around you, this is your 'blood bubble'
5. Space participants out so that if the knife slips, no one is close enough to be harmed
6. Ensure that whittling is done away from the body and legs and provide correct modelling of good techniques
7. Demonstrate how to make the item
8. Shallow angle to the blade, taking off small slithers, little nibbles
9. Tuck four fingers under knife handle and place the thumb on the back of the blade for more control

### Whittling ideas:



## Woodland calls

Stopping and listening to the natural world, developing an awareness of others and connecting with nature: suitable for youth groups

### Resources

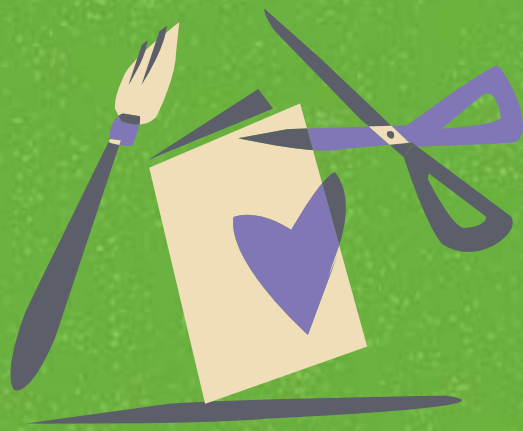
- Hands
- Sticks

### Activity

1. While out exploring split the group so that they are out of sight of each other and challenge them to communicate with each other using only natural sounds
2. Make owl hoots with hands – it may take a while for them to realise they need to make the call and then stop to listen for a response

3. Bang sticks against dead trees – challenge the group to hammer as fast as a woodpecker, at least 40 times a second!
4. You may notice on future visits how the group is now more aware of the natural sounds around them





## CREATIVITY

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**Providing challenge, success  
& using resources creatively**

## CREATIVITY

**W**e were asked what is the secret to engaging community groups with a museum of trees. The response was instantaneous – fire, food and something to make to take home. The latter was particularly useful as it enabled participants to both explore the versatility, properties and folklore of trees, and create tangible memories of their time with the project.

Like holding a cup of tea, creative activities provided anxious participants with something to do with their hands and minds, and enabled people to be part of a group activity without requiring them to be the centre of attention. By removing this pressure, people naturally started to open up and engage in conversation. There was a sense of not being judged or being placed under the spotlight, as everyone else in the group was busy with their own works of art. It created a time when it was acceptable to talk to each other without making eye contact (something that can be quite daunting), because you were all looking at what you were making rather than each other. For the participant, the activity was the focus and the chat a by-product – although, in reality, we purposely planned the activity into the programme to facilitate the chat.





Creativity can be fun! Too many people back away from creative activities because they feel they are not artistic. But creativity doesn't have to be about drawing a scientifically accurate botanical sketch or painting the Sistine Chapel.

Painting with mud and crushed-up leaves to make natural paints would limit the expectation placed on participants to create a masterpiece – especially if their only paintbrush was a gnarled stick found lying on the floor.

Creativity could be big scale and involve the use of big, often very sharp tools. One art project required participants to make over 400 wooden roof tiles or shingles by hand.

Participants had to split and shape each tile, starting with a set of wedges and a mallet (which would have impressed Thor), before placing it on a shave horse and shaping it with a

blade known as a draw knife. Each tool had the potential to cause injury if not used properly. Although used under supervision, the use of the tool gave the activity an edge of excitement and risk, which appealed to a much wider audience than a simple drawing project would have done.

Creativity was also used in resources and programme planning. As mentioned before, engaging certain hard-to-reach groups with a tree collection can be challenging. But thinking creatively, and getting permission to work outside of the traditional remit of the organisation, could spark an interest that may eventually become a flame.

We developed a trail looking at the folklore and fashion of certain trees in the collection, aimed particularly at young people who tended to be more fashion-conscious. This worked well on-site, but one of our local youth groups could not access the arboretum due to transport limitations. So how did we engage them with the collection when we didn't have it at hand?

Still using fashion as a theme, and particularly Victorian fashion (the arboretum being originally planted in the Victorian era), we used packets of plastic beads imitating jet and amber (both coming from trees and popular with the Victorians) to introduce monkey puzzle trees and several pines to participants while making bracelets in the youth club.



**“The activity got residents talking to each other (which is a hard thing to do!) and has also been a talking point since. Everyone enjoyed the visit and found it interesting, improving their wellbeing in general.”**

Dementia Group Leader

## Miniature cherry trees

Using unusual materials creatively to make links with trees: suitable for outreach youth groups.

### Resources

- Anything that looks like a bare tree (pipe cleaners, cardboard tubes, etc)
- Glue gun and glue sticks
- Pink sequins
- Clay

### Activity

1. Show the group images of cherry trees in blossom
2. Use the glue gun to attach the pink sequin blossoms to your mini tree
3. Press the completed cherry tree into a small ball of clay to enable it to stand up

Don't worry if you don't have access to the same materials we did – this is about using materials creatively and in unusual ways to represent trees.



## Natural paints

Experiment and explore creatively with natural materials: suitable for craft and chat groups, youth groups

### Resources

- Mandala outlines/blank paper
- Many pots
- Paintbrushes (tiny)
- Water pots half-filled and paper towels
- Pipettes
- Pestles/stirrers
- Forage baskets for collecting – vibrant tree blossoms, berries, soil, grass, herb-layer plants (such as dock), etc.

### Activity

1. Show the group an example of a mandala
2. Where possible, go for a foraging walk to collect items
3. Add a good amount of blossom or natural object into the pot
4. Mash it up
5. Add one pipette of water to the pot, if needed
6. Paint and watch to see what happens when the paint dries



## FOOD & DRINK

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Creating cosiness  
& comfort

### FOOD & DRINK

**H**ygge is all about feeling cosy, relaxed and at ease with others – a feeling which can seem like quite a challenge to achieve out in the woods on a wet November day. However, there is nothing more calming than being offered a cup of tea and a biscuit.

It can act as an ice-breaker or provide a temporary focus and occupation until you feel confident to join the conversation. For some participants, the time it takes to drink a cup of tea was the time needed to settle into the surroundings, place their daily concerns and worries to one side and collect their thoughts in order to focus on the day ahead. For others, the making of hot drinks was their contribution to the wellbeing of the group, a role that enabled them to feel of value.



**“I enjoyed my time at Westonbirt sitting round the fire, making and drinking cups of tea, getting to know the trees and plants. The lovely staff made it even better.”**

Addiction rehabilitation group participant

One thing we have discovered over the past four years is that, in general, if you want to engage any age group, use food. Sharing a packet of biscuits at tea break would lead to a discussion about the best biscuit, with allegiances formed between the custard cream connoisseurs versus the supporters of the simple shortbread. Even the quieter members of the group would often speak out in defence of their favourite.

Food was also used in a more creative way, to connect aspects of our site to wider audiences. At an arboretum, it can be quite a challenge to connect teenagers to the wonders of trees. However, chocolate comes from a tree, as do cherries, so we made cherry and

chocolate chip muffins and explored trees through sweets with pear drops, cherry sours, apple bonbons and chocolate limes. Once interested, it was easier to start introducing other tree-related topics.

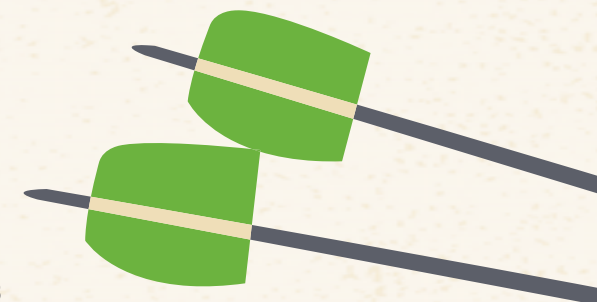
For older adults participating in the outreach programme in care homes and memory cafés, cooking was not an option, so sharing teas from trees and woodland jams acted as a conversation starter for reminiscing about memories of trees and woods.



The preparation and cooking of food has been a great activity to encourage sharing and companionship. Pizza is made and cooked on the final session of multi-visit programmes, with participants making the dough, preparing the toppings and cooking the pizza itself. The process of preparing a meal together brought people closer, allowing them to swap cooking tips, reminisce about baking cakes as a child and chat about people they cook with now. Like creative activities, cooking also gave people a task to focus on which freed the mind to engage in conversation with others without feeling under pressure to contribute to it.

**“I liked the marshmallows. I ate four. I had to wait for them to cool down. I found waiting very difficult but I did it. And I asked for more by myself.”**

Young person with complex additional needs





## Teas from trees

Exploring the importance of trees in our lives – traditions and herbal medicinal properties: suitable for most groups except for care homes due to a wide range of medical conditions

### Resources

- Tea set – kettle, teapot, cups, spoons
- Range of teas linked to trees – elderberry, apple, pine needle, cherry Bakewell, etc.
- Information cards about each tree ingredient and its herbal properties – including image of the tree

### Before the session

- Speak to the group leader about this activity, specifically in relation to medical conditions
- Select the teas carefully to ensure as many of the group have the opportunity to ‘taste the trees’ as possible

### Activity

1. Challenge the participants to taste the trees through trying a selection of teas but remind them that they do not need to try anything they're not comfortable with
2. Show fact cards and/or discuss how these trees have traditionally been used for their herbal properties
3. Make a pot of tea for one of the types of tea and give a small amount to each person participating
4. Then repeat with other teas
5. You could ask them to score each one



## Chocolate truffles

Making tasty connections with trees, using ingredients from trees: suitable for youth and adult outreach

### Ingredients

- Makes 10 truffles
- 4 digestive biscuits
- 1 ½ heaped tablespoons of drinking chocolate (plus extra for dusting)
- 2 or 3 tablespoons of condensed milk

### Method

1. Place your digestive biscuits in a large bowl or a plastic bag and bash them

- up with a rolling pin (or something similar) until the digestives are small powdery crumbs
2. Add the chocolate drinking powder and mix
3. Add the entire can of condensed milk and stir until thoroughly combined
4. Put a couple more tablespoons of drinking chocolate powder on a chopping board
5. Scoop a teaspoon of the mixture and roll in your palms until it takes the shape of a small ball. Roll the truffle in the drinking chocolate powder and set aside
6. Repeat!
7. Once all the truffles are made, place in a clear bag for presentation

## Celebrations pizza, cake & twist

Celebrating programmes and personal achievements: suitable for any multi-visit group

As well as recognising participant achievement throughout a programme, a shared cooking activity can help create an informal opportunity for group reflection. Here, it is the preparation of the food as a group, rather than the food itself, which is the important factor.

### Cob oven

At Westonbirt, we are fortunate to have a wood-fired cob oven which enables us to regularly make pizza with groups. Alternatively, use tortilla wraps

and pizza ingredients and cook on a skillet over a bonfire.

### Cake

Everyone loves cake at a celebration. Scoop out the inside of an orange and fill with cake mixture (use a packet mix for ease). Wrap in foil and cook in the embers of a campfire.

### Twist

- 500g self-raising flour
- 75g caster sugar
- 200ml water
- Chocolate spread or jam
- A green stick with bark removed

### Method

Mix the ingredients into a dough and divide into eight portions. Take one portion and roll into a thin sausage shape, then wrap around the stick. Hold the stick over the campfire embers, turning regularly, until the dough feels hard. Once cool, eat with jam or chocolate spread.



## FIRE & WARMTH

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**Reflection, resilience, risk  
& responsibility**

## FIRE & WARMTH



**F**ire is very hygge. There is something about fire that attracts people to come together and share stories, thoughts, experiences, feelings or silence.

We all know fire can be dangerous. But so can most things if we don't know how to use them safely and responsibly. It is fair to say there was a lot of nervousness about the idea of community groups lighting fires in the arboretum.

So why did we use fire as a central activity in our community programmes?

As well as being an effective and traditional method for disposing of waste plant material in woodland management, it provided a heat source on cold, wintry and wet days. It was also an opportunity for people to come together and cook, chat or simply share silence. It could be used as an exciting hook to engage people so that we could progress onto other key messages about the formal botanic collection, coppice restoration and properties of trees. But fire also helped with reflection, resilience, risk and responsibility.





## Reflection

Fire was used for both formal evaluation and informal reflection, for ice breakers, group discussions and general chats. Participants naturally created a circle, the most inclusive shape for sharing. Fire also provided a focal point so no one was in the 'hot seat'. Fire helped create a sense of hygge cosiness, atmosphere and homeliness, nurturing us in its warmth on cold winter days and providing protection, perhaps resonating with some ancestral memory of warding off wild animals.



## Resilience

**'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.'**

Robert the Bruce may have been inspired by the efforts of a spider while hiding in a cave, but he could just as easily have been describing the determined effort of someone trying to light a fire with a fire steel. We were constantly surprised at how people, who had often given up on other activities as being too difficult (or the default excuse of too boring), persevered in trying to set light to a ball of cotton wool.

They recognised they'd simply not learnt the technique yet and needed more practice. Rather than give up, they developed resilience through handling failure successfully and were usually the first ones to volunteer the next time a fire needed to be lit.

## Risk

As well as a sense of excitement and thrill, fire-lighting gave people the opportunity to assess fear and manage risk in a supervised environment.

## Responsibility

With risk comes the responsibility of managing it safely, both for us as activity leaders and for the groups themselves. Participants were taught how to manage and control fire, learned about the fire triangle, chose suitable locations and material size to prevent the fire spreading, and made the fire site safe after use.

Fire doesn't have to be big. When in the specimen tree collection, a small cast iron fire barbecue was sometimes used, which could be easily moved and left no trace after use.

**"I enjoyed today because I love working outdoors and working hard. I learnt how to start a fire easily and I learnt how to layer trees. I like how they trusted us with all the equipment."**

Young person





## Kelly Kettle challenge

Gaining a sense of achievement, building self-confidence, resilience and self-esteem: suitable for youth groups, mental health and rehabilitation groups

### Resources

- Kelly Kettles including fire pans
- Container of drinking water
- Fire steels
- Tinder (cotton wool, petroleum jelly, wood shavings)
- Wood fuel, small or short sticks to be collected by group
- Fire blanket and fire bucket
- Fire gloves (one pair per Kelly Kettle team)
- First-aid and burns kit
- Marshmallows (if used)
- Skewers for marshmallows (if used)
- Wooden discs for bases (same number as kettles being used)

### Before you start

- Set out wooden discs, fire pans and empty kettles
- Fill fire bucket with cold water

### Activity

1. Introduce, explain and demonstrate activity:
  - explain construction and operation of Kelly Kettle
  - explain and demonstrate operation of fire steel
  - explain/discuss fire triangle, highlighting the need for LOTS of firewood of different sizes
2. H&S points to cover:
  - fire spreading
  - only lighting fires at approved sites
  - using the fire bucket for burns
  - how to place and remove kettle
  - potential for scalds from kettle tipping over or while pouring hot water
  - fire collapsing when removing kettle from base once boiled
  - kneeling on one knee, NOT sitting on floor

## Charcoal-making

Being creative: suitable for most youth and adult groups

### Resources

- Secateurs
- Loppers
- Gloves
- Charcoal-burning tin(s) – metal with lid, but a few small holes to relieve internal pressure

### Activity

1. Light a fire and ensure there is a good bed of embers – this can take at least an hour
  2. Each participant prepares short (greenwood) sticks by cutting to a size that will fit into the tin, no longer than about 10cm. All pieces should be similar in diameter and length
  3. Prepared sticks are placed into the tin
  4. Lid is put on the tin and the tin is placed in the fire
  5. Monitor – first wait until a good deal of white/brown/grey smoke appears. Once the smoke goes clear, remove the tin from the fire and allow to cool
  6. Open the tin and observe/compare the appearance of the charcoal
3. Give each participant a fire steel and ensure that everyone manages to get a spark
  4. Divide into 'teams' and set the challenge: First team to boil enough water to make a hot drink for each member 'wins'
  5. Make sure kettle has water in before placing on fire pan and remove bung from spout
  6. Make sure fire gloves are used
  7. Make sure fire is not built up in chimney
  8. Once water has boiled, get them to remove kettle from fire using fire gloves
  9. Water can be poured straight into mugs or used to (re)fill flasks. Should be done at ground level to reduce risk of scalding. DO NOT HOLD MUGS/FLASKS IN HANDS WHILE POURING HOT WATER
  10. Ensure kettle is placed out of the way to cool down
  11. Extension activity: Keep the fire going long enough to 'toast' marshmallow – fire pan should be carried to ash disposal point using fire gloves, ashes tipped out and pan placed out of the way to cool down





## NATURE

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Exploring the great outdoors

## NATURE

**T**here has been a growth in research about the wellbeing benefits of spending time outdoors with nature. From ecotherapy to social forestry, natural play to health walks, time spent in green spaces and natural environments has been found to improve mental and physical health, reduce stress and anxiety, and increase self-esteem.



It would be reasonable to assume that working in an arboretum, nature is present in everything we do as a matter of course, and in most of our activities that is true. However, even at Westonbirt, we still sometimes have to make a concerted effort to connect with the natural world surrounding us.

A large proportion of the community engagement programmes at Westonbirt took place in Silk Wood – a good 15-minute walk through the woods from the main car park. Yet, in our urgency to arrive at the shelter

and start the activities that groups had signed up for, we sometimes forgot to savour the environment we passed through on our journey. Some 17 champion trees (the largest or tallest in Britain and Ireland) and six vulnerable or endangered tree species from around the world can be found along that short route alone. Yet, walking past them almost every day, it was easy to take them for granted and assume other people would do so too.



**“Wonderful contrast to today’s hectic world  
— instant effortless meditation.”**

Group participant



Taking time to explore these trees is something we had to plan actively into our session. Stopping to smell the candy floss scent of the katsura, listen to the spring sap rising in a birch or collect leaves for nature printing was an important part of enabling group participants to engage with the collection. What were daily occurrences for us as staff and volunteers were spectacular moments to others, from the changing seasons to extremes in weather and passing wildlife.

mobility, the need to be near toilet facilities and susceptibility to cold would restrict how far into the woods we could venture. Where possible, we endeavoured to bring the woods into the classroom with sensory activities, simple green working crafts and using natural resources from the collection for nature printing and natural windows. Many of these activities resulted in a finished craft that participants could take home with them to continue to remind them of the outdoors.

For some facilitated visits, connecting with the outdoors could be a challenge due to the specific requirements and additional needs of the participants. These sessions often took place within the learning centre. Limited



## Nature printing

Connect with nature through creativity, gaining a sense of satisfaction and achievement through art: suitable for all groups

### Resources

- Blank cards or notelets
- Ink pads
- Scrap paper
- Forage baskets or collected leaves
- Leaf ID sheets (keys)
- Pens/pencils
- Paper towels
- Rubbish bin/bucket for inky leaves and paper

### Activity

1. Go on a forage walk to collect items
2. Select card to be used
3. Place leaf vein-side down on the ink pad
4. Cover with scrap paper and rub all over, feeling the leaf edge and stalk
5. Take off scrap paper and carefully lift leaf off the ink pad
6. Place leaf, ink-side down on card, taking care not to move it
7. Place a fresh piece of scrap paper over the top and rub all over, taking care not to move the leaf underneath
8. Carefully lift off the paper and then the leaf
9. To make a herbarium card, identify the leaf and label the card

### NOTE

Be aware of participants collecting poisonous plant materials

**With our outreach programmes, the use of scents, sounds and tactile objects can help evoke memories of the woodland environment.**



## Seasonal windows

Enhancing self-esteem and encouraging creativity with natural objects: suitable for mental health, rehabilitation, dementia and care home groups

### Resources

- Card frames, such as picture mounting frames, with internal window slightly smaller than A5
- Sticky-backed plastic, enough for one each, including yourself
- Plastic A4 document covers cut in half to A5 size
- Sellotape
- Natural materials

### Before the session

- Cut and stick sticky-backed plastic on one side of the frame and re-cover sticky side with its backing paper

### Activity

1. Go for a walk through an area with a variety of fallen natural materials
2. Hand out a prepared frame to each participant, asking them to remove the backing paper

3. Invite the participants to stick fallen natural materials inside the sticky window
4. Create your own alongside the group, demonstrating what to do
5. Once participants have finished their creation, provide a plastic cover to sandwich the natural materials and stick the cover to any areas of sticky-backed plastic to remove as much air as possible. This will help to keep the colour of the objects for a bit longer
6. Sellotape the plastic cover at the edges, if necessary

### NOTE

Be aware of participants collecting poisonous plant materials





## KEEP IT SIMPLE

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**Back to basics**

### KEEP IT SIMPLE

**H**ygge is not about trying to wow people with extravagance – but about creating a warm and supportive environment in which people can grow in confidence and self-esteem.

Keeping things authentic, even if that means rustic, can have a huge impact on a person's wellbeing. Our shelter in the woods, despite being furnished with a collection of second-hand and homemade equipment, is our shelter. A place where people feel at home and often described as a room without walls.

Of the many activities that we tried with different community groups over the past four years, the most successful were the simple ones, both to execute and achieve. Participants did relish a challenge, but also needed to experience success, often within the limited time imposed by the length of the session. Simple activities that required fewer resources would ease participants into trying new things without being overwhelmed by fear of failure. The simpler an activity to run, the more time activity leaders and volunteers had to spend with individual participants, getting to know them as people and supporting them to push themselves to take on new challenges.



## Plan more, do less

Working with unknown groups or new audiences, a constant worry was the need to fill every available moment with activity to prevent boredom, conflict and disappointment. We all wanted to deliver a good product and would not have been working with community groups if we didn't care about them gaining the most out of their time with us. Therefore, it was useful to have several contingency plans to fall back on when thrown a curveball, such as extreme weather or a wider range of additional needs, interests or abilities.

However, we didn't implement them all just because we had planned them. We needed to allow the group, and ourselves, to take the time to savour the moment, soak up the surroundings and relish everyone's achievements.

**“I felt I was and have been thoroughly changed. I have gained confidence and ideas, I have even shown others how to communicate with birds (woodpeckers mainly) and track animals. I even got some wood and made a few things myself. The best thing is I bonded with other people who I wouldn't always talk to. I could not imagine not going to Westonbirt. It's a big part of my life.”**

Young person



## Recommended reading & websites

“Five ways to wellbeing”. In, 23. London: New Economics Foundation Jody Aked, Nic Marks, Corrina Cordon and Sam Thompson. 2008

“The Little Book of Hygge, The Danish Way to Live Well.” Penguin Life. Meik Wiking (from The Happiness Research Institute, Copenhagen). 2016

“Manifesto for the Green Mind”. Ecologist, Nature and Health, Pretty, J. March 2017

“The restorative benefits of nature: towards an integrative framework”. Journal of Environmental Psychology, 15: 169-182 Kaplan, S. 1995.

Well-being for all? The social distribution of benefits gained from woodlands and forests in Britain. Local environment, 19, 4: 356-383. O'Brien, L and Morris, J. 2013.

“WHY ADVENTURE? The Role and Value of Outdoor Adventure in Young People's Personal and Social Development: A Review of Research” The Foundation of Outdoor Adventure, Jon Barrett & Dr. Roger Greenaway. 1995

Research project “Living with dementia and connecting with nature – looking back and stepping forwards”. Dementia Adventure Neil Mapes. Feb 2011

“Whittling Handbook”. Peter Benson. 2016. Published by The Guild of Master Craftsmen

“Wood-fired oven cookbook”. Holly and David Jones. 2016. Published by Aquamarine

[www.outdoor-learning.org](http://www.outdoor-learning.org) Institute for Outdoor Learning, supporting individuals and organisations who use the outdoors to make a difference for others

[www.gov.uk/government/news/new-research-into-dementia-and-the-role-of-the-natural-environment](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-research-into-dementia-and-the-role-of-the-natural-environment) Natural England survey, March 2016

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For further details about Westonbirt, The National Arboretum, please contact 0300 0674891

To find out more about the community engagement programme at Westonbirt and a range of other Forestry Commission social forestry projects, please contact 0300 0674854









From building relationships and shared memories to creating the right atmosphere, *How to Hygge a Tree* provides inspiration and practical support to help develop and deliver wellbeing community engagement programmes in heritage and outdoor environments.

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