

Forests as places of mental wellbeing: the meaning and use of urban forests by people with early-stage dementia

Mandy Cook

Economic and Social Research Council/Forestry Commission Scotland PhD Studentship



Larbert Woods, Forth Valley Royal Hospital, Larbert, Stirlingshire, Scotland

Co-Production

- ▶ Forestry Commission Scotland
- ▶ Alzheimer Scotland
- ▶ Other Third Sector Organisations
- ▶ Other Public Sector Organisations
- ▶ Individuals with Dementia
- ▶ Carers




Introduction



The Issue

For 2015, Alzheimer Scotland reports that there are approximately 90,000 people living with dementia in Scotland, with around 3200 of these people under the age of 65.

The number of people with dementia in Scotland is expected to rise to 164,000 By 2036.



Statistics: Number of people with dementia in Scotland 2015

Approximately 90,000 people have dementia in Scotland in 2015. Around 3,200 of these people are under the age of 65.

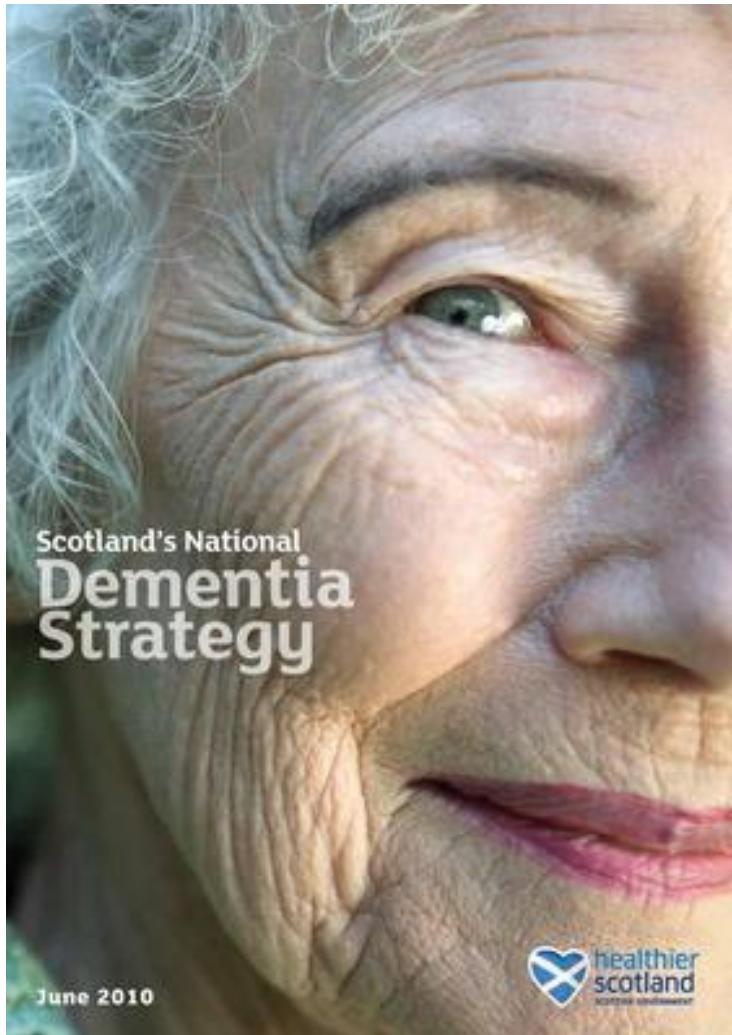
Table 1: number of people with dementia in Scotland in 2015 by local authority area

Local authority	Under 65	65+	Total
SCOTLAND	3,213	86,666	89,879
Aberdeen City	129	3,252	3,382
Aberdeenshire	164	4,078	4,242
Angus	71	2,259	2,329
Argyll & Bute	57	1,884	1,941
Clackmannanshire	32	725	757
Dumfries & Galloway	96	3,212	3,307
Dundee City	79	2,662	2,741
East Ayrshire	74	1,995	2,069
East Dunbartonshire	65	2,021	2,086
East Lothian	61	1,752	1,813
East Renfrewshire	54	1,660	1,714
Edinburgh, City of	287	7,536	7,823
Eilean Siar	17	585	603
Falkirk	95	2,386	2,480
Fife	223	6,459	6,682
Glasgow City	340	7,552	7,892
Highland	150	4,214	4,363
Inverclyde	49	1,374	1,423
Midlothian	51	1,299	1,350
Moray	55	1,670	1,725
North Ayrshire	84	2,380	2,464
North Lanarkshire	197	4,498	4,695
Orkney Islands	13	388	401
Perth & Kinross	96	3,053	3,148
Renfrewshire	105	2,645	2,749
Scottish Borders	74	2,191	2,265
Shetland Islands	15	387	401
South Ayrshire	71	2,391	2,463
South Lanarkshire	197	5,109	5,306
Stirling	53	1,535	1,588
West Dunbartonshire	56	1,349	1,405
West Lothian	104	2,168	2,272

Changing views on dementia support



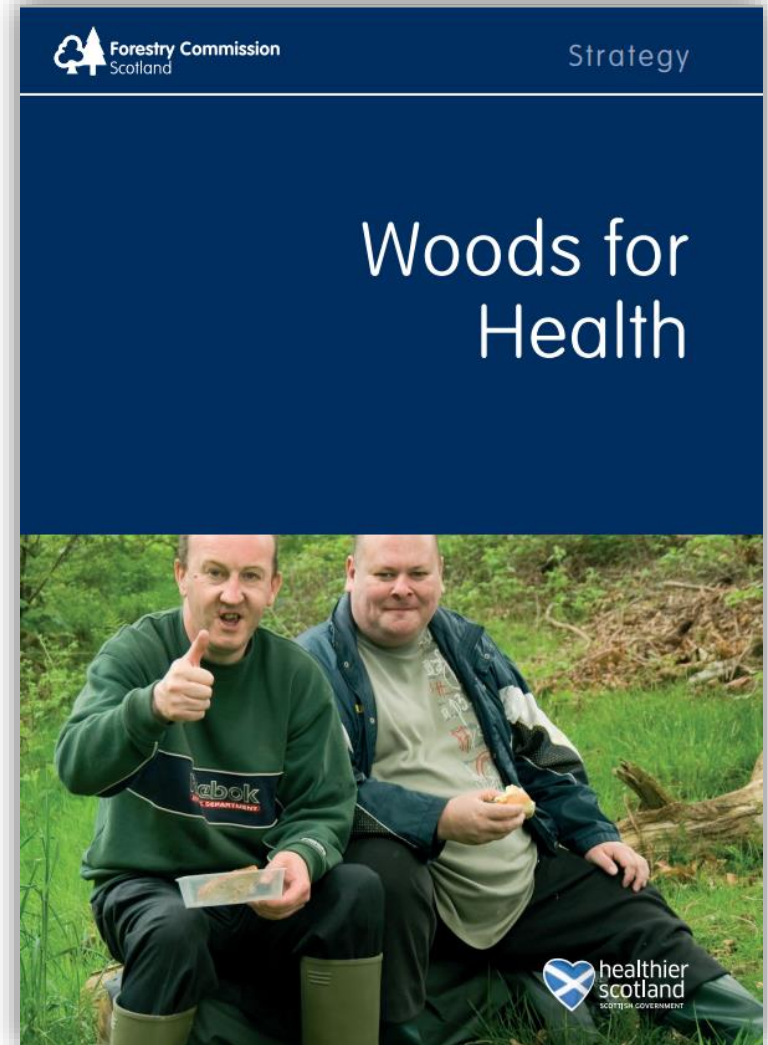
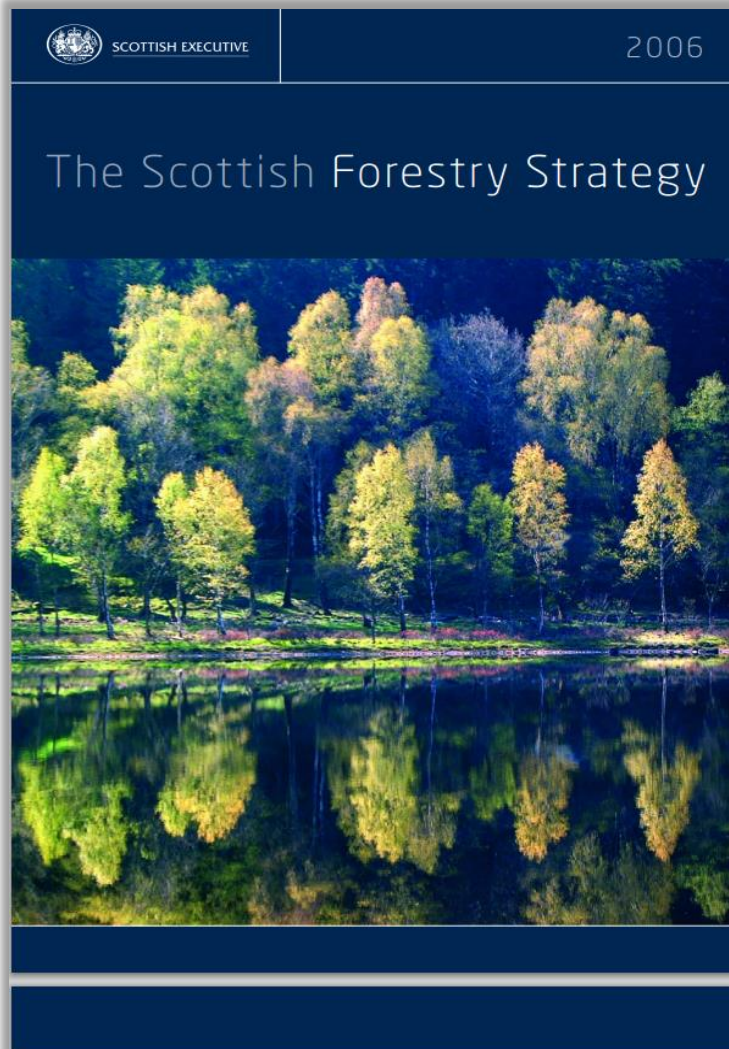
Policy drivers in Scotland



The over-arching question is:

What are the means by which people with dementia can live life to the fullest and have the space to experience and celebrate life regardless of dementia?

Policy drivers in Scotland



Research Design

- ▶ Case Study
- ▶ Participatory Action Research



Art



Photography



Methods

Phase 1 – Evidence Synthesis

- Realist Review.

Phase 2 – Exploration

- Key Informant Interviews (policy- and decision-makers)
- In-depth and walk-along interviews: used to capture and distil the experiences of people with early-stage dementia who already engage with urban forests, eg as part of a woodland activity programme or walking group.
- Semi-structured interviews with employees of organisations involved in urban forest use/management, eg rangers, walking group leaders and artists.

Methods – Walk-along Interviews



Drumpellier Country
Park, Coatbridge,
North Lanarkshire,
Scotland

'part of my memory'

A Person with Early-Stage Dementia

Methods – Walk-along Interviews

Perth, Scotland



‘Stopping and being able to touch things, I think that’s really important. If everything in your dementia world is a bit uncertain and fluid, then to feel something that is really solid in your hand is reassuring’.

A Carer

Methods – Walk-along Interviews



Duthie Park, Aberdeen

An Alzheimer Scotland Walkie Talkie Group

'In a walking group you have more opportunities for one to one conversations – staff with carers discussing problems, carers with carers – the conversation is more free flowing, it's not the same if you are sat around a coffee table, you get to know people more when you're walking'.

Evidence from preliminary research and interviews

Evidence from Phase 1 & 2:

- Barriers.
- Mental well-being.
- Meaning and identity.
- Nature connections.
- Social development and connections.



An outdoor classroom, Perth, Scotland

Setting Up The Pilot Woodland Activity Programmes

Phase 3 – Implementation

- **Woodland Activity Programme:** The results from Phase 1 & 2 have been used to design and deliver two (10 week) pilot programmes of woodland activities in an urban setting for people with early-stage dementia.
- During each session I recorded logistical problems encountered, changes made to the activities, weather conditions and observations of participants' behaviour, engagement and interactions.
- Semi-structured interviews with participants and carers (following woodland activity programme).
- Semi-structured interviews with facilitating staff (rangers).

The Woodland Activity Programme

Week 1

The rangers will give a short presentation detailing the logistics of the programme, including the John Muir Award. (**Discover, Explore, Conserve and Share**)

This will be an opportunity for participants to meet staff and other participants and will allow staff to go through all relevant paperwork.

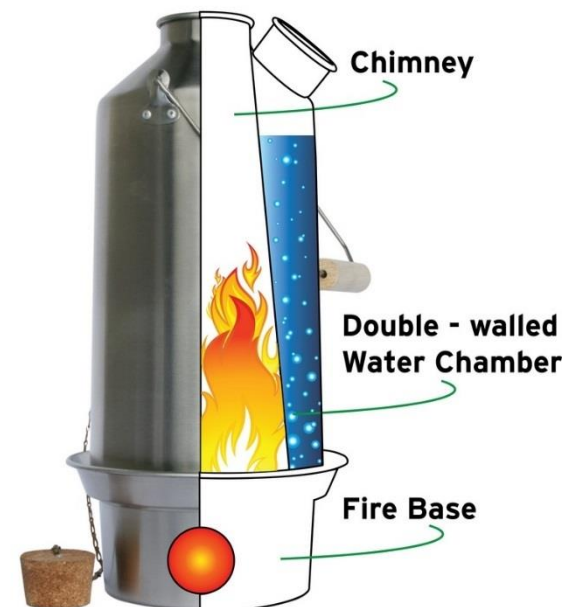
- Introduction to Site
- Kelly Kettles (portable devices for boiling water outdoors using twigs)
–Tea/Coffee/Biscuits
- Site Walk

Week 2

- Wood Cookies
- Kelly Kettles – Tea/Coffee/Biscuits
- Leaf ID & Leaf Collecting & Leaf Art (making pictures using card, glue, leaves and other natural materials found in the woodlands)

Week 3

- Introduction to photography (use of cameras to take pictures for a memory book)
- Kelly Kettles – Tea/Coffee/Biscuits
- Fire-lighting demo, Wooden Tongs and Waffles on Fire



The Woodland Activity Programme

Week 4

- Introduction to Bird ID/Making Bird Feeders out of Pine Cones and Willow (using lard and bird seed)
- Kelly Kettles – Tea/Coffee/Biscuits
- Baked Potatoes (on the fire)

Week 5

- Creating A Green Man Face on the Trees (using clay)
- Soup over fire
- Kelly Kettles – Tea/Coffee/Biscuits
- Storytelling / linked to the Green Man, the woodland and site history

Week 6

- Tree planting
- Kelly Kettles – Tea/Coffee/Biscuits
- Tree poetry

Week 7

- Bird and Bat Box Building
- Kelly Kettles – Tea/Coffee/Biscuits
- Making wooden musical instruments and natural rhythms



The Woodland Activity Programme

Week 8

- Willow cutting and weaving (making a simple hurdle)
- Kelly Kettles – Tea/Coffee/Biscuits
- Making Bird/Bat Boxes (using pre-cut wooden kits)

Week 9

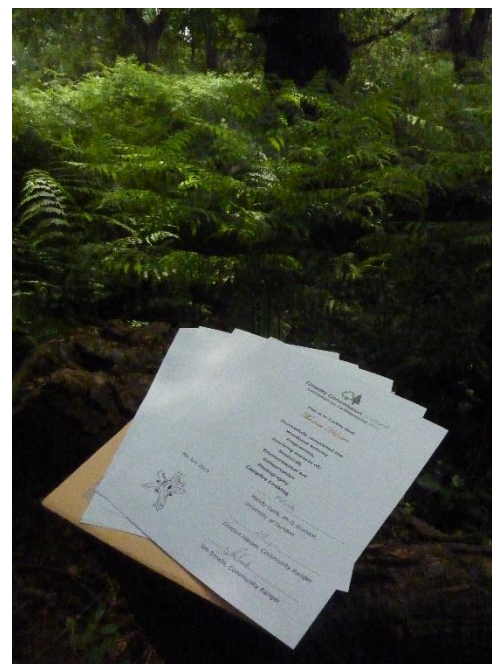
- Cordage and bracelet making
- Kelly Kettles – Tea/Coffee/Biscuits
- Chocolate bananas on fire

Week 10

- Awards presentation with slide show
- Kelly Kettles – Tea/Coffee/Biscuits

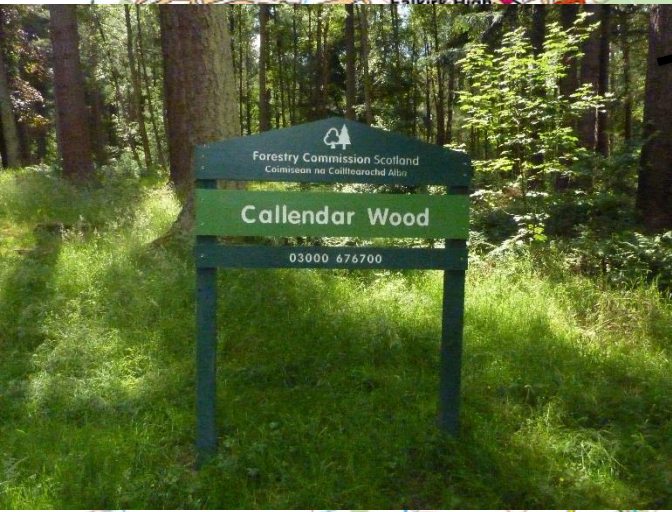
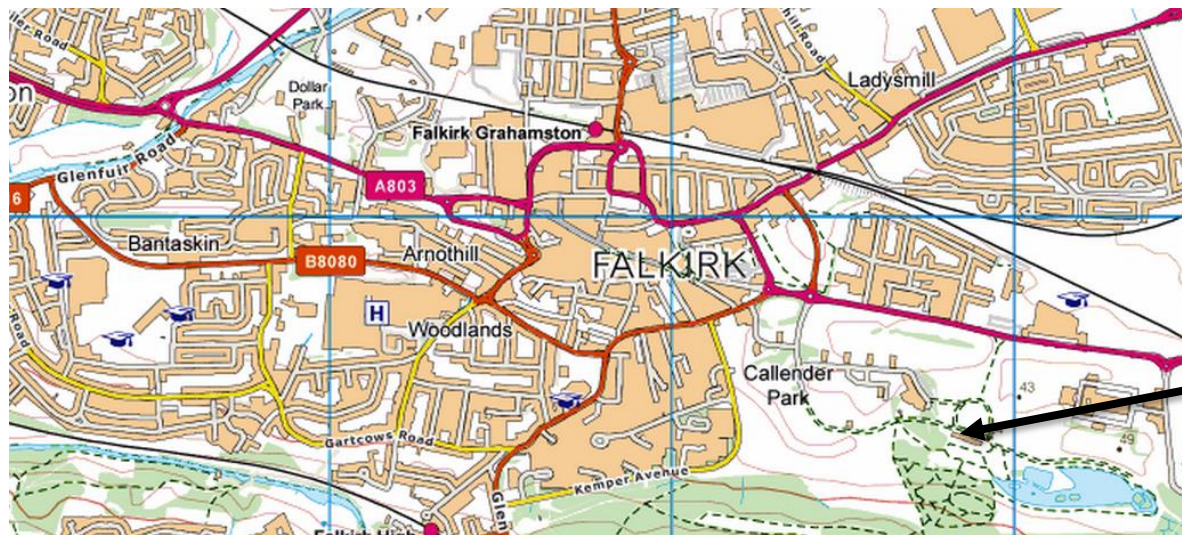
Memory Book

Throughout the 10 week programme each participant will create a Memory Book ('My Woodland Story So Far...') which will be a photographic record of activities they were involved in during the woodland programme, something to look back on (jog memories) and something to add to in the future.

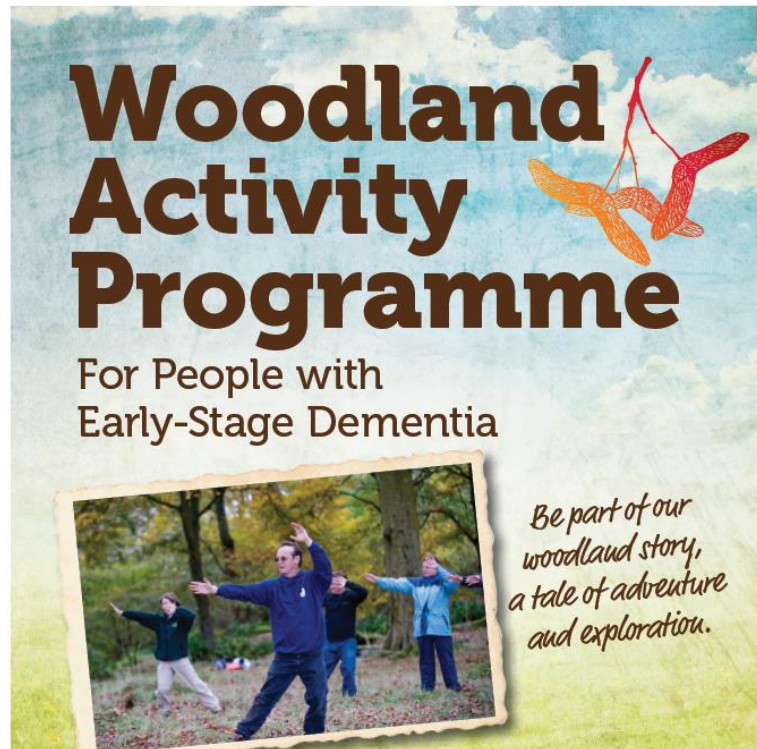


Pilot Woodland Activity Programmes

Callendar Wood, Falkirk, Stirlingshire, Scotland



Pilot Woodland Activity Programmes



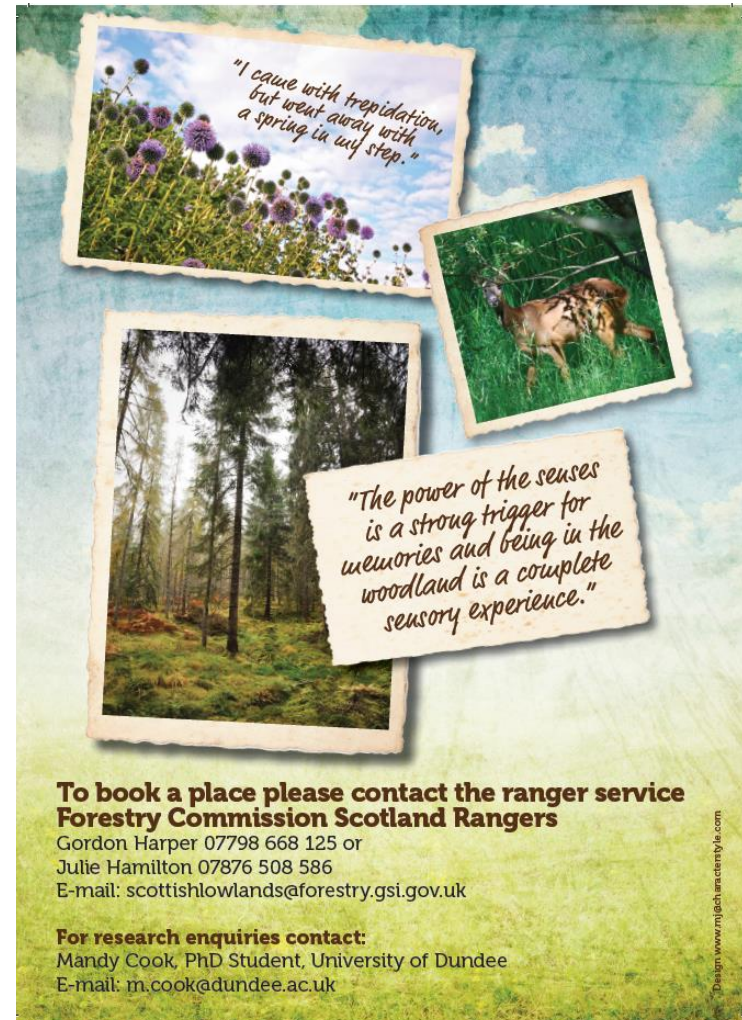
Woodland Activity Programme

For People with Early-Stage Dementia

Be part of our woodland story, a tale of adventure and exploration.

The poster features a collage of images: a pair of colorful, stylized wings in the top right; a photograph of three people in a forest with their arms raised in the bottom left; and a quote on a torn paper background: "I came with trepidation, but went away with a spring in my step."

Callendar Wood, Falkirk
May to July 2015



"I came with trepidation, but went away with a spring in my step."

"The power of the senses is a strong trigger for memories and being in the woodland is a complete sensory experience."

**To book a place please contact the ranger service
Forestry Commission Scotland Rangers**
Gordon Harper 07798 668 125 or
Julie Hamilton 07876 508 586
E-mail: scottishlowlands@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

For research enquiries contact:
Mandy Cook, PhD Student, University of Dundee
E-mail: m.cook@dundee.ac.uk

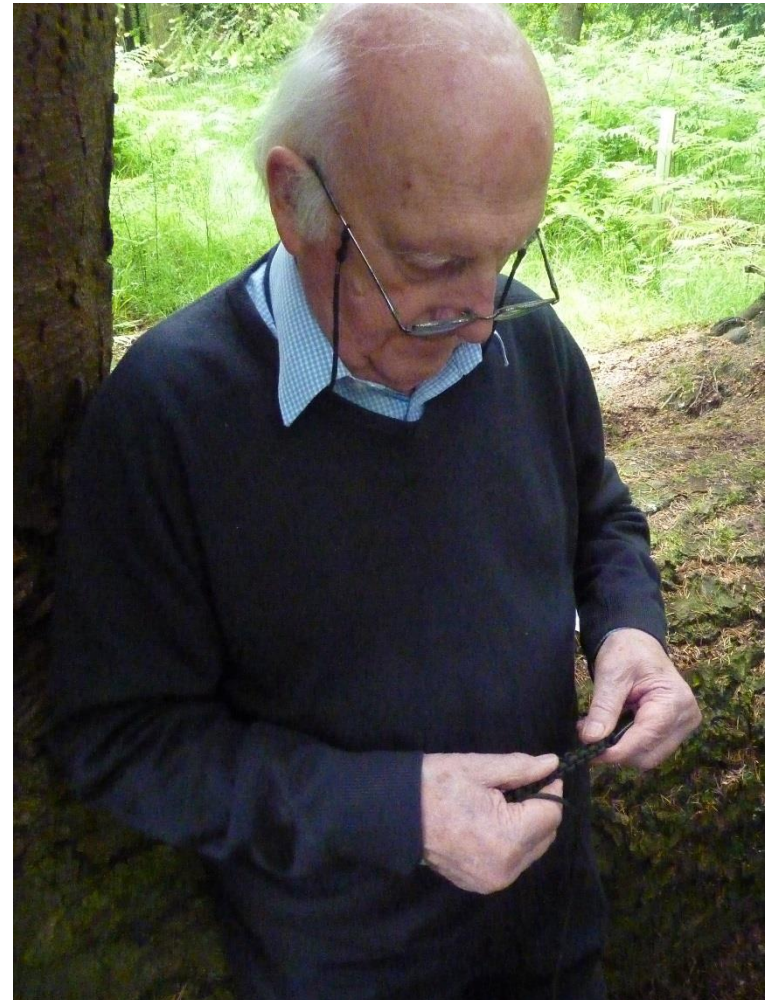
Design: www.mjgdesignstyle.com



Woodland Activities



Sourcing materials from the forest to make a woodland whistle.



Making a survival bracelet out of para cord.



Woodland Activities



Making a Native American dreamcatcher, decorated with special objects found in the woods.



Woodland Activities



Building Bird and Bat Boxes to Take Home





Woodland Activities



Using clay and natural materials to create a Green Man on the tree trunks.



Woodland Activities



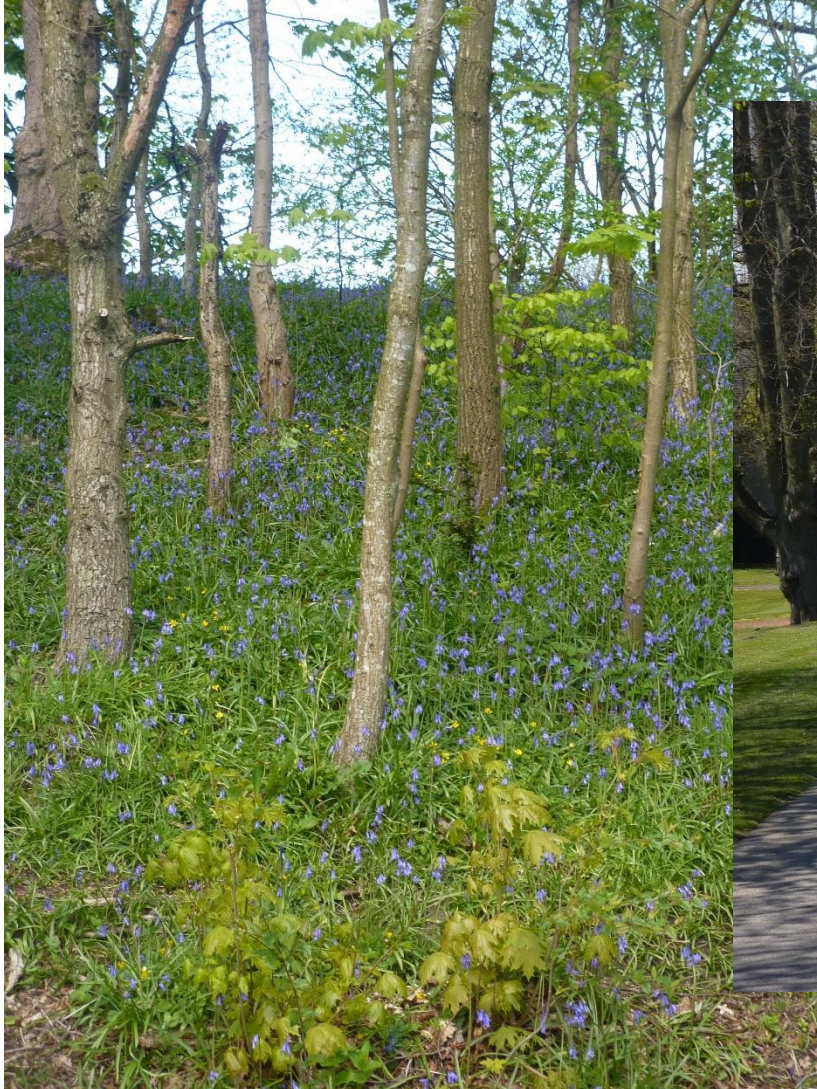
Building a camp fire every week to make a brew using the Kelly Kettles.



Pancakes for lunch!



Woodland Activities



Seeing the changing seasons and enjoying a walk in the sunshine.



Woodland Activities



Identifying some of the different tree species found in Callendar Wood using guide books.



Woodland Activities



Woodland art.

*"This picture shows our thoughts of the woodland – the fresh leaves symbolise the beginning of the summer and the end of spring."
(participant)*





Woodland Activities



Learning how to willow weave to make a hanging bird feeder.





Woodland Activities



Planting Wild Cherry and Hazel.



Woodland Activities



Enjoying the chat, the sunshine and the bird song.

Initial Findings from the Pilot Woodland Activity Programmes

Key Themes Identified

1. Mental Well-Being

- Mental restoration – relaxing, quiet, calming, exciting, reflective, stimulation, removes stress, not feeling under pressure, peace of mind, adventure and challenge.
- Escape and freedom.
- Enjoyment and fun.
- Positive respite for carers.
- Physical well-being.

*'I enjoyed it thoroughly and missed it
when I wasn't there'*
(participant of woodland programme)

2. Meaning & Identity

- Memories of childhood activities.
- Purpose and something to do.
- Improvement in self-esteem.
- Lost identity.
- Confidence.
- Learning and trying something new.
- Sense of pride and achievement.
- Still being able to do things (confirmation of self).



Initial Findings from the Pilot Woodland Activity Programmes



Key Themes Identified

3. Nature Connections

- Sensory stimulation.
- Strong connection to changing seasons.
- Sense of place.



4. Social Development

- Meeting new people.
- Making friends.
- Sharing experiences.
- Interacting with rangers.
- Team building.
- Supportive behaviour – helping others.
- Being with other people with dementia and carers.

'The interaction with the rangers has been really important. It's not been a case of them making judgements or anything. They haven't. They've gone in whole heartedly and shown a lot of encouragement'
(carer)

Conclusions and recommendations

1. The woodland activity programme has a direct connection to the Alzheimer Scotland **8 Pillars Model of Community Support** through the pillars of therapeutic intervention, community connections and support for carers.

2. Initial findings from the woodland activity programme illustrate the huge benefits that can be gained from taking part, both for people with dementia and carers.

3. The woodland activity programme can be seen as an alternative intervention, which will enhance the services currently available for people with dementia, especially those in the early stages (where service provision is currently lacking).



Copyright © Alzheimer Scotland 2012



Conclusions and recommendations

4. With the prevalence of dementia expected to continue to increase for many years, it is important to have alternative, more holistic services available, which are adapted for people with dementia of varying ages, with diverse interests, likes and dislikes and from many different backgrounds and geographical locations.
5. The woodland activities being delivered by trained, knowledgeable and experienced rangers who were suitably resourced to run a successful and safe programme is an important factor.
6. If a person with dementia wants to - and is able to - engage with tree, woodland and forest environments, it is important for them to have support from families, friends, green space and health-care staff to help them to do this, either individually or as part of an organised, supported group activity, such as a woodland activity programme.



Next Steps

- To increase the evidence base by delivering and evaluating further pilot woodland activity programmes.
- To find funding to carry out a larger scale research and evaluation study to quantify the benefits of woodland activity programmes for people with dementia.
- To find funding to carry out an economic assessment of the benefits of the woodland activity programmes against more traditional therapeutic interventions.





Research Contact: Mandy Cook, email: m.cook@dundee.ac.uk

Research Note available at Forestry Commission Scotland website:

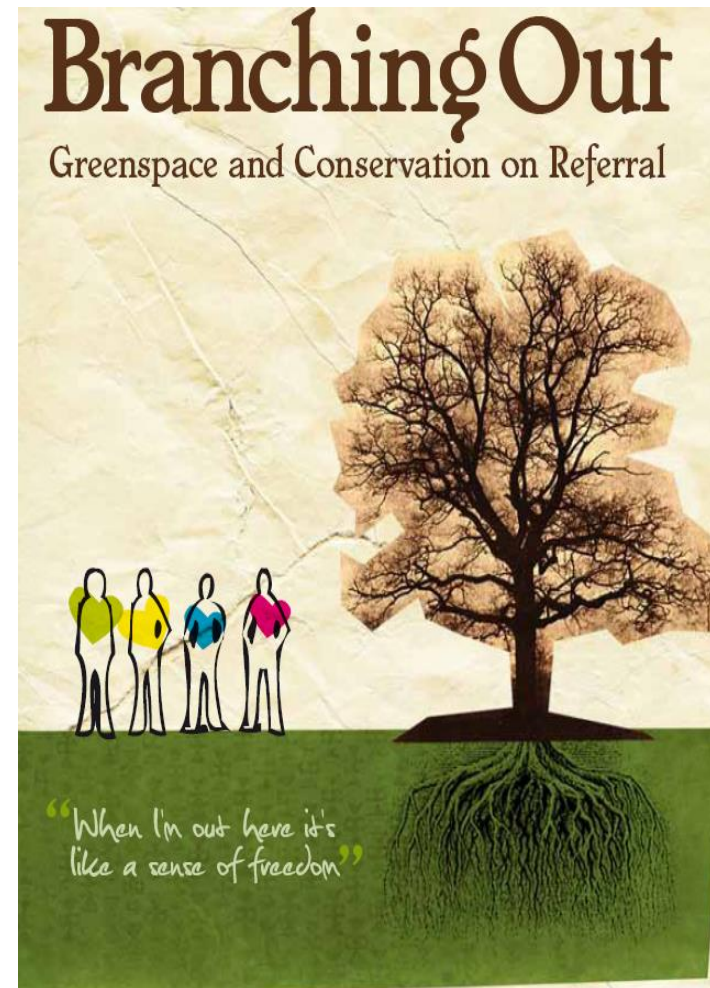
<http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/supporting/strategy-policy-guidance/health-strategy/forests-and-dementia>



Forestry Commission Scotland Contact: Kevin Lafferty, email: kevin.lafferty@gsi.forestry.gov.uk

Green Prescription Programme

- Greenspace and conservation on referral for adults using mental health services
- Michael Varnam Award by UK Public Health Association 2010
- Programme runs in majority of health boards across Scotland
- Established training programme for environment and health professionals
- Economic study first systematic economic evaluation of an outdoors health programme in UK (2016)
- Below NICE threshold for Quality Adjusted Life Years



Branching Out History

- Developed in 2007 as pilot project.
- First year saw three groups run in woodland park (managed by Ranger service)
- Pilot was set up by Forestry Commission Scotland, Health Department and NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde (state health board)



Where is Branching Out at now?

- Branching Out is now delivered in 9 of Scotland's 14 health board areas
- This is delivered by 17 NGO partner organisations
- Approximately 300-400 people graduate from Branching Out per year
- Over 2000 people have taken part since 2007
- Recently celebrated our 200th group

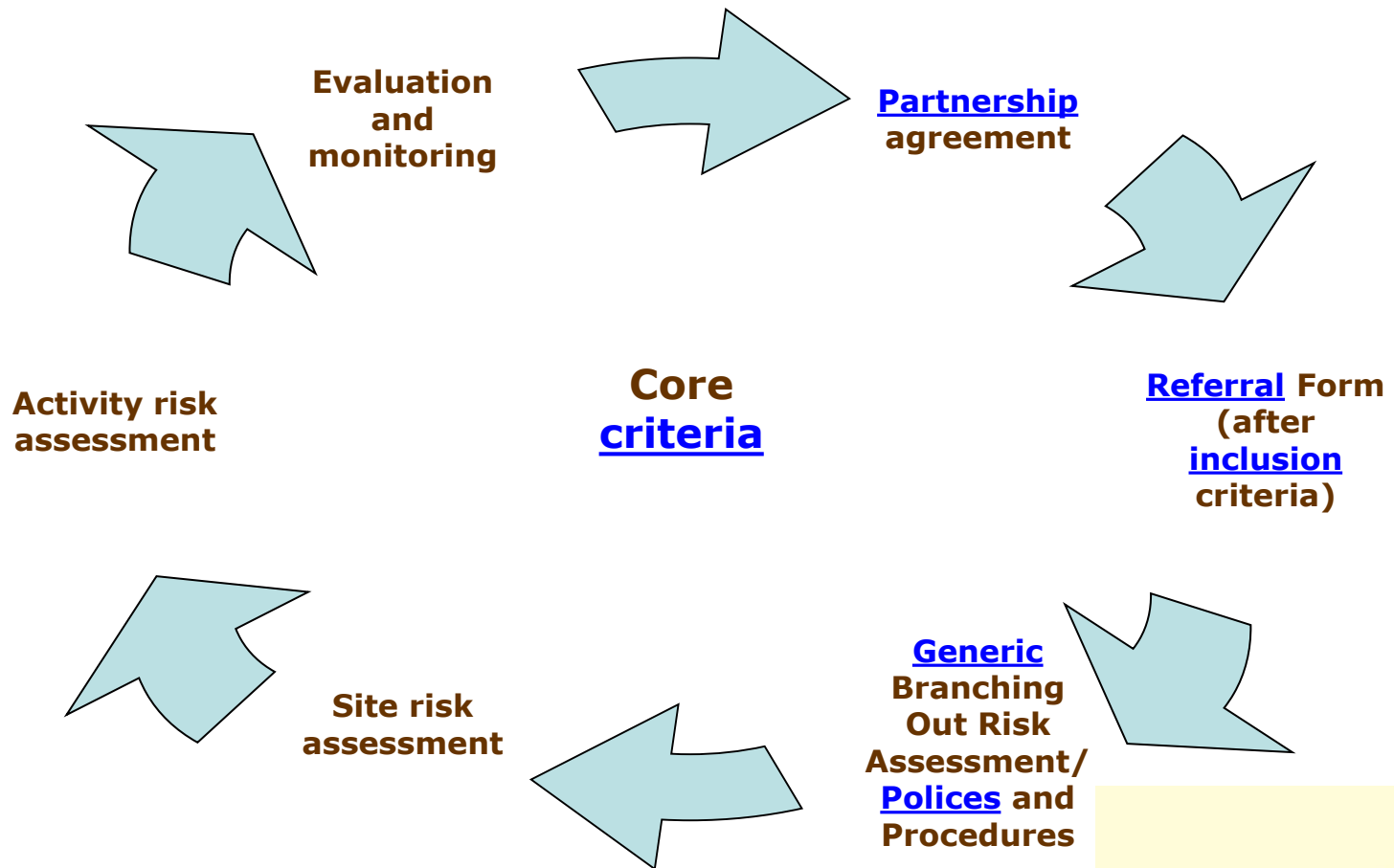


What does Forestry Commission Scotland provide?

- Core policy framework
- Training
- Resources
 - Leaflets & brochures
 - Website with downloadable resources and documents www.forestry.gov.uk/branchingout
- Sub group meetings with delivery partners
- Steering group (key NHS & delivery partner representatives)



Core policies



Branching Out Training

🍂 Three day leader course

- Background to the Branching Out programme
- Benefits and barriers to working with mental health groups outdoors
- Mental health awareness
- Health behaviour change
- Mental health services, staff and terminology
- Branching Out policies and procedures
- Presenting to mental health services and patients
- Planning and running Branching Out
- Professional boundaries
- Evaluation methods
- Skills sharing



🍂 Two day assistant course for healthcare practitioners



Branching Out Training

Pre-requisites to be a Branching Out Leader:

- Outdoor professional
- Scottish Mental Health First Aid
- Outdoor first aid certificate
- Optional Food Hygiene certificate
- Public Liability Insurance



Costs

Draw up a costing for all costs

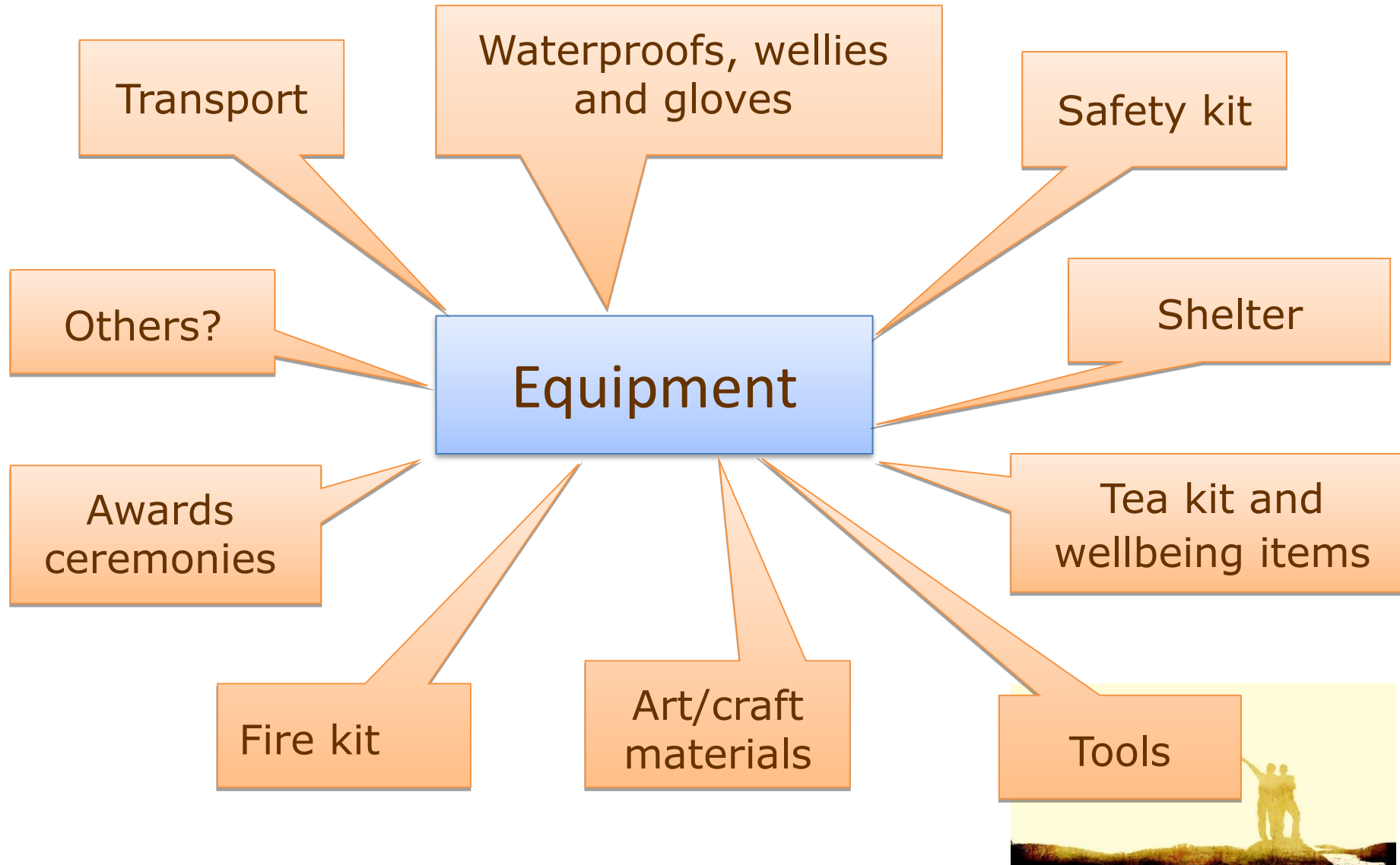
Example costs:

- 🍁 Transport \approx £1500
- 🍁 Staff costs/time? \approx £4000?
- 🍁 Equipment \approx £500
- 🍁 External skill buy in (t'ai chi, willow weaver? \approx £300)

Estimate for your first group = approx £4000-6000



Things to think about:





73 million visits...

We are the **largest** single provider of countryside leisure visits in England.

We look after more than 1,500
forests and woods in England

40 key sites
24 visitor centres

99% of England's population
live within an hours drive from
one of our woods.

**Closer than
you think...**

