

Designing outdoor learning activities to support wellbeing



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CONTENTS

1	Survey background.....	3
1.1	Aims of survey.....	3
1.2	Survey methods	3
1.3	Respondents	3
2	OTHER LITERATURE.....	3
3	Type of outdoor learning activity.....	4
3.1	Activity preferences	4
3.2	Alternative suggestions.....	4
4	Programme Preferences	6
4.1	Programme mix.....	6
4.2	Meeting frequency.....	6
4.3	Seasonal variation	7
5	Group meetings	7
5.1	group size	7
5.2	Group interests /experiences	8
5.3	Group age.....	8
5.4	Group gender	9
5.5	Specific characteristics.....	9
5.6	Opportunities to make friends.....	10
6	Other comments	10
7	Survey summary.....	11
8	Additional Project resources.....	11
9	Principles of empowerment.....	12
10	About us	12

1 SURVEY BACKGROUND

1.1 AIMS OF SURVEY

This survey aimed to replace a pilot study of outdoor sessions which were to be held in the London Borough of Richmond which aimed to workshop different outdoor learning activities and gauge the impact of those activities on reducing loneliness and isolation.

Due to social distancing requirements at the time when the project took place the methodology for the project was changed so that data was collected via an online survey rather than through planned workshops in outdoor spaces.

The survey sought to understand the different ways of bringing people together and the best way to design outdoor learning activities and workshops to benefit wellbeing.

1.2 SURVEY METHODS

Working in partnership with the South West London Environment Network, an online survey was generated and promoted via social media throughout the period that it was open which was from 22nd July to 31st August.

A link to the online survey was sent to 45 respondents of a previous survey who said that they would be interested in taking part in the design of sessions to promote well-being through spending time outdoors. Participants were targeted for inclusion in the project through email.

We also approached Richmond based organisations to pass on information about the research project to their members. These groups included Multicultural Richmond, Richmond Mind, Ruils, Skylarks, Richmond Carers Centre. Several schools and organisations working with special needs children and their families were also contacted to encourage them to take part. These included St Edmunds School in Whitton, TAG Youth Club in Ham, Phyz and Children's Centres in Richmond. **Results**

Due to the extraordinary circumstances and our inability to bring groups of people together at a time when there was a national requirement to observe social distancing regulations and no more than 6 people could meet together, there were no responses from people without access to online technology

1.3 RESPONDENTS

There were a total of 13 responses to the survey. Six had contributed to the previous survey. The survey was anonymous, and no demographic questions were asked as part of the survey.

2 OTHER LITERATURE

While there are plenty of studies that consider the benefits of nature for wellbeing there is little available that discussed the design of activities for groups in urban environments. The WWF and the Mental Health Foundation collaborated on a publication 'Thriving With Nature' which was republished in July 2020. www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/thriving-with-nature/guide

"This guide contains imaginative and simple suggestions for seasonal activities to help you engage with nature in your area throughout the year. Each activity will

have different components that research suggests can be helpful for supporting your wellbeing (such as staying active, connecting with others, or spending time in green spaces). If any of these activities feel like a stretch for you right now, even just noticing more of the nature around you is a good start and there are suggestions for what you might notice in each season as well. “

3 TYPE OF OUTDOOR LEARNING ACTIVITY

The original methodology for this part of the project involved holding workshops on several of these different activities and seeking responses from participants. In the survey we asked respondents to consider 10 different activity types and state which type of activity that they would like to see more opportunities available. One respondent stated: *“Unsure how this fits with social distancing.”* Given the circumstances of the time that the survey was taken, this is a reasonable point to make, however the survey was designed to understand what respondents felt would be beneficial for their wellbeing in non-Covid times.

Survey participants were asked if they were:

- Interested
- Neither interested nor disinterested or had
- No interest

3.1 ACTIVITY PREFERENCES

NOTE Respondents were asked to respond to each option so that the total percentage shown is for more than 100%.

There was significant interest in all activity types highlighted but there were two activities types that respondents were most interested in. These were:

- walking and rambling activities (92%) activities
- Activities that include the senses (92%)

There was significant interest (>70%). in activities that involved

- learning about the work of other organisations,
- environmental campaigning,
- environmental surveys and
- activities and opportunities to build resilience and socialising

The only activities that had limited interest were conservation volunteering (39% neither interested nor disinterested).

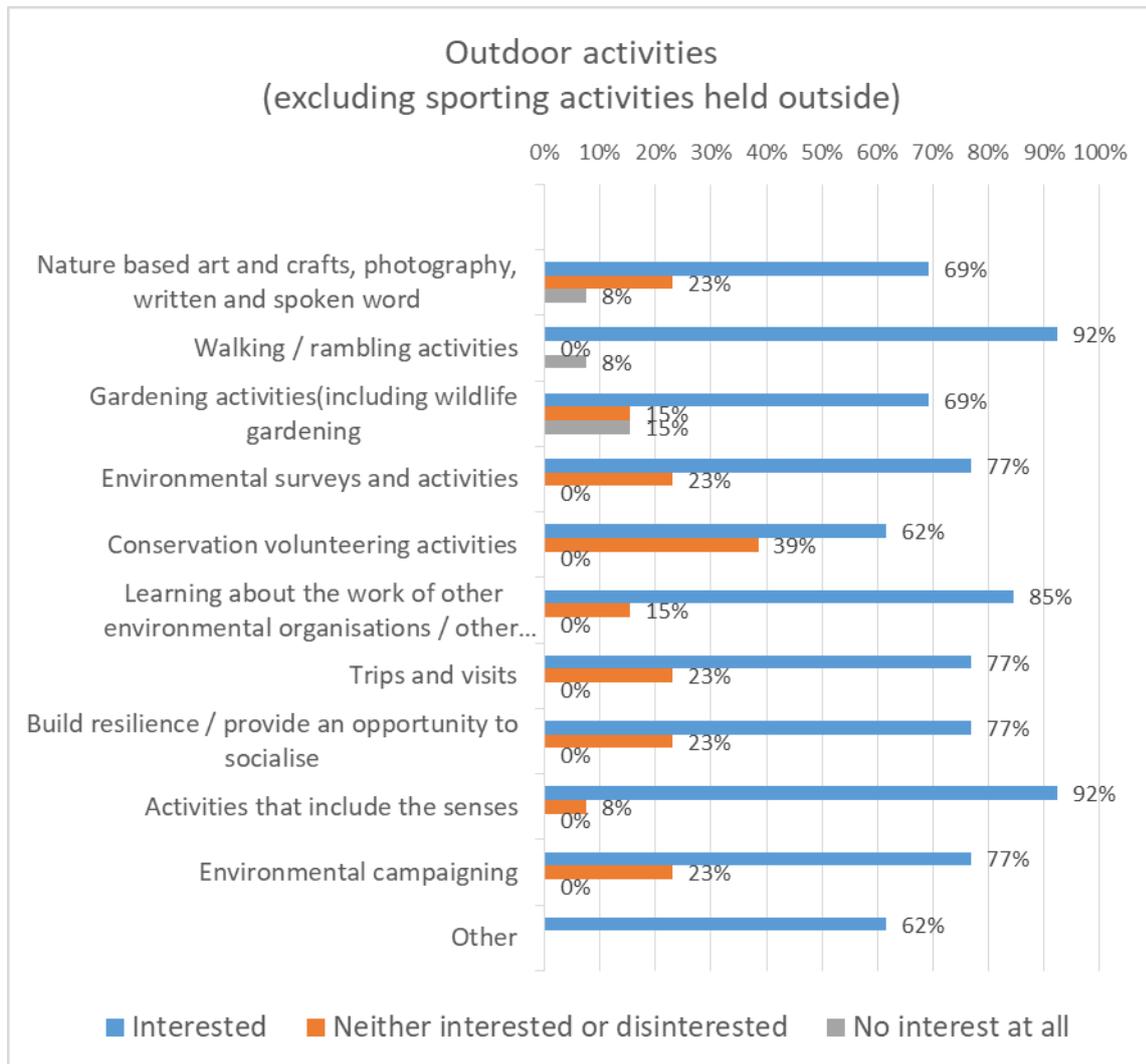
3.2 ALTERNATIVE SUGGESTIONS

There were alternative suggestions for activities given by respondents. These included some suggestions that could be included in future programmes:

- Just chatting to folk. Designing places to bring people together is useful

- Seasonal changes of wildlife flora and fauna
- Bat walks, cloud identification and astronomy
- How to help injured wildlife
- Geocaching
- Bird watching
- Planting fairy gardens and taking part in group work
- Art and photography courses
- Maps and creative ‘treasure hunts’ over distances might be fun.

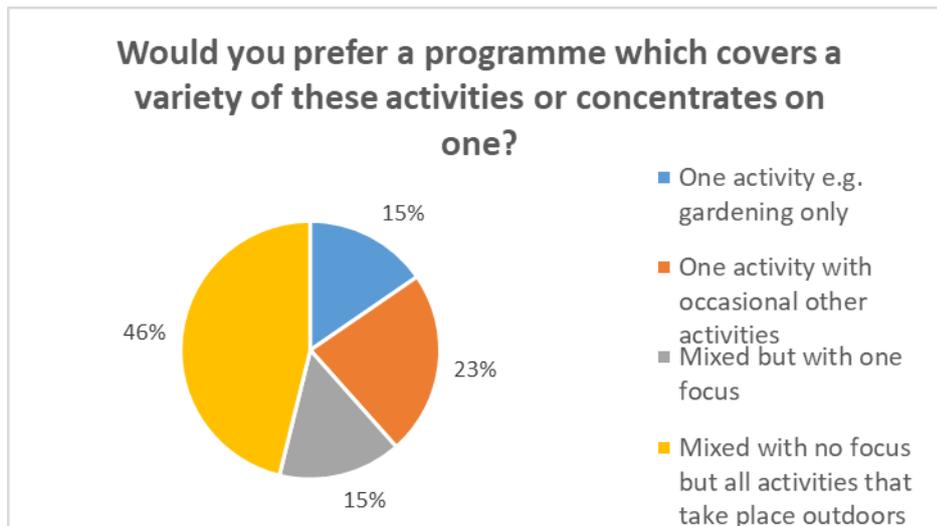
Others would be more suited to a different type of organisation with specialist knowledge and skills e.g. sailing.



4 PROGRAMME PREFERENCES

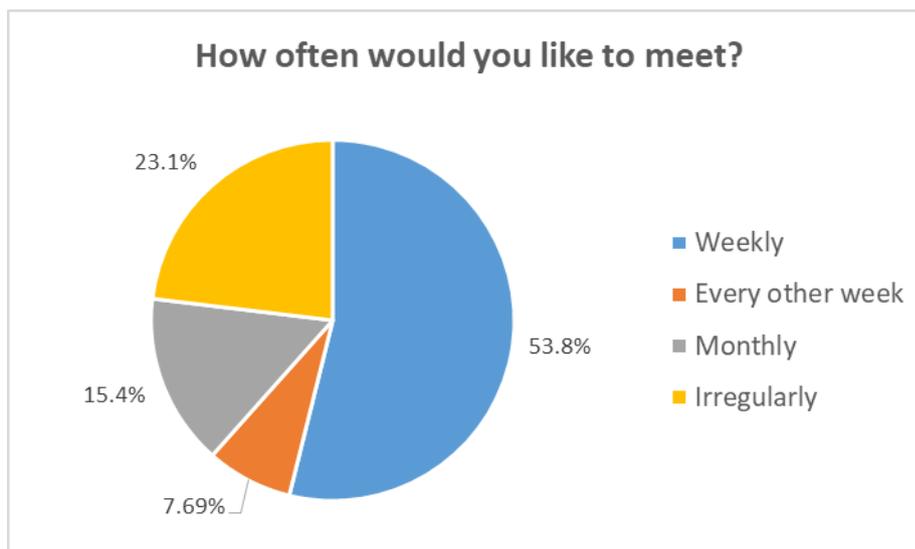
4.1 PROGRAMME MIX

We also asked if respondents would like a mixed programme of different activities or one with a regular type of activity. Nearly half respondents (46%) of respondents said that their preference would be to have a mixed programme of activities, and almost a quarter (23%) said that they would prefer one activity with occasional other activities. (We did not ask respondents to specify what that one activity would be.)



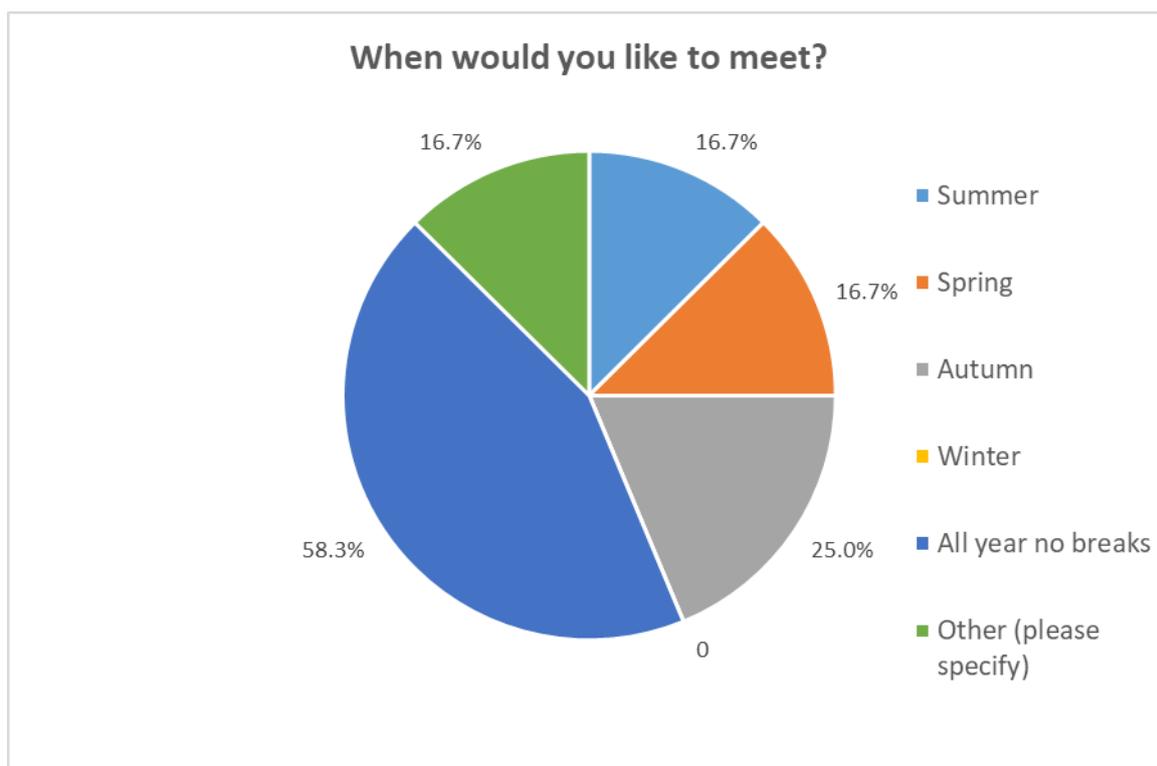
4.2 MEETING FREQUENCY

Most respondents (53.8%) would prefer a weekly meeting, however nearly a quarter (23.1%) were interested in irregular meetings. There was only limited interest in programmes that were less frequent.



4.3 SEASONAL VARIATION

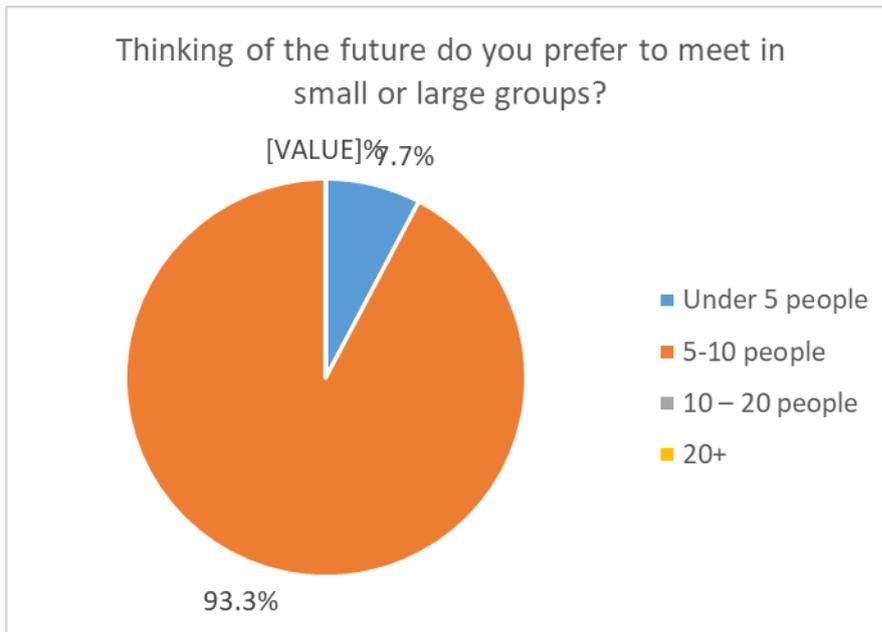
Most respondents (58.3%) responded that there was no need for seasonal variation of the programme, however there was one comment which suggested that programmes should be responsive to bad weather “All year, but with a break when the weather is worst (Dec / Jan)” No one was interested in meeting only in winter, however there was some interest in programmes in the autumn were of interest (25%). There was a minority (16.7%) of respondents whose preference (given as *Other* below) is for irregular meetings throughout the year.



5 GROUP MEETINGS

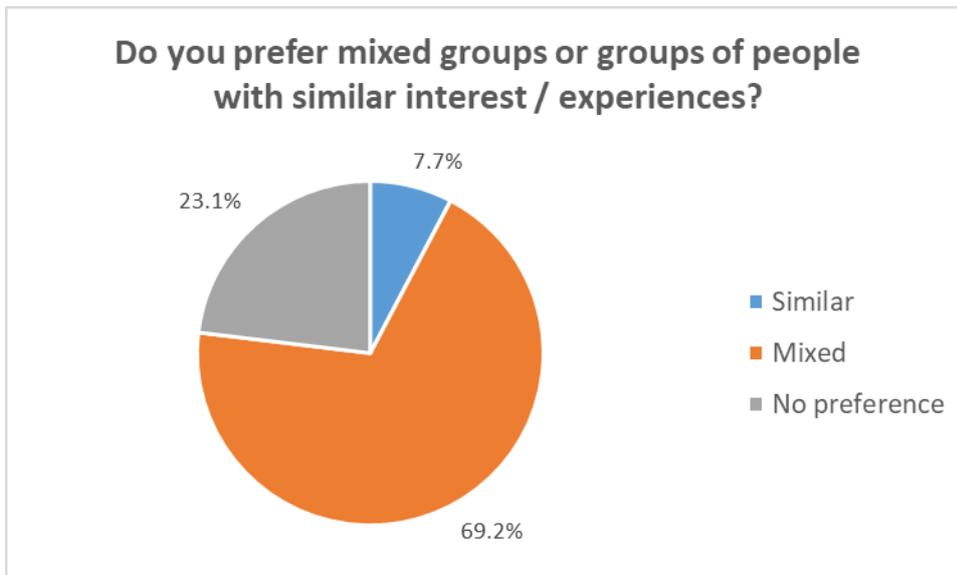
5.1 GROUP SIZE

Most respondents (93.3%) considered that groups meeting should be between 5-10 people with a smaller number (7.7%) who had a preference for smaller groups. No one showed an interest in groups larger than 10 people.



5.2 GROUP INTERESTS /EXPERIENCES

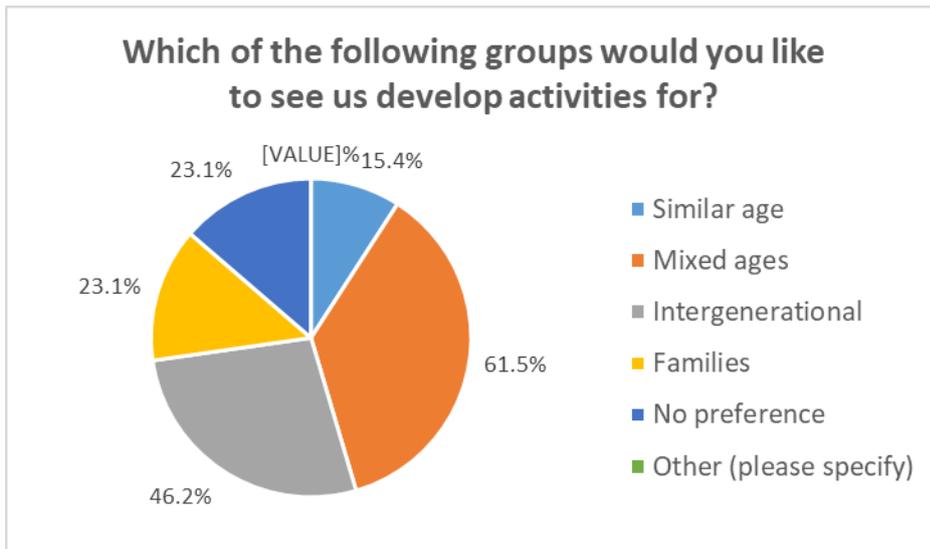
Most respondents (69.2%) showed a preference for groups composed of beneficiaries with a mixture of experiences and interests, however nearly a quarter (23.1%) said that they did not have a preference.



5.3 GROUP AGE

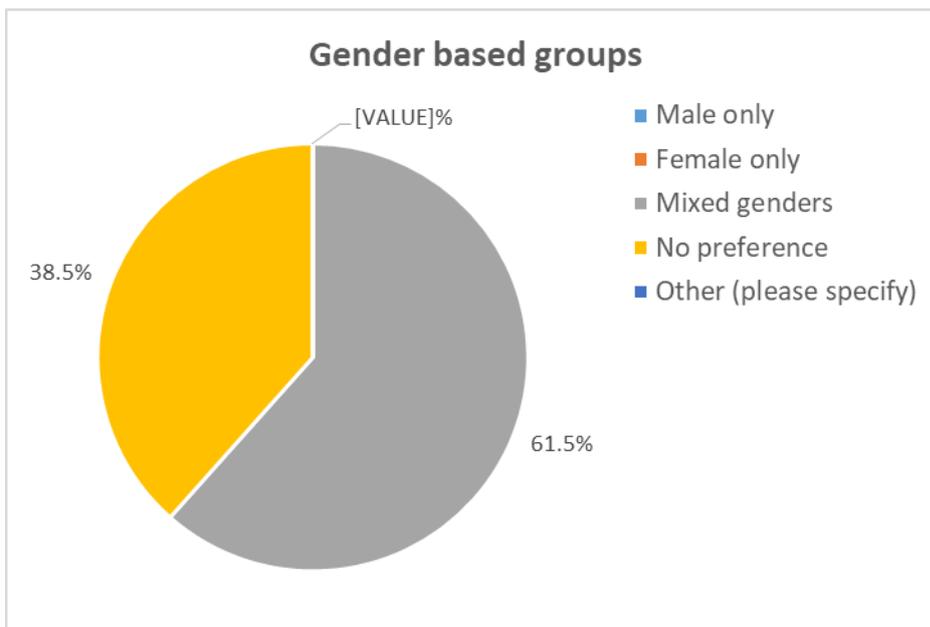
NOTE Respondents were able to choose more than one option so the total percentage shown is for more than 100%.

Most respondents (61.5%) had a preference for groups of mixed ages with some interest groups that were intergenerational (46.2%) groups. Nearly ¼ (23.1%) showed interest in groups that are for families. A similar number had a preference for groups where the beneficiaries are of a similar age.



5.4 GROUP GENDER

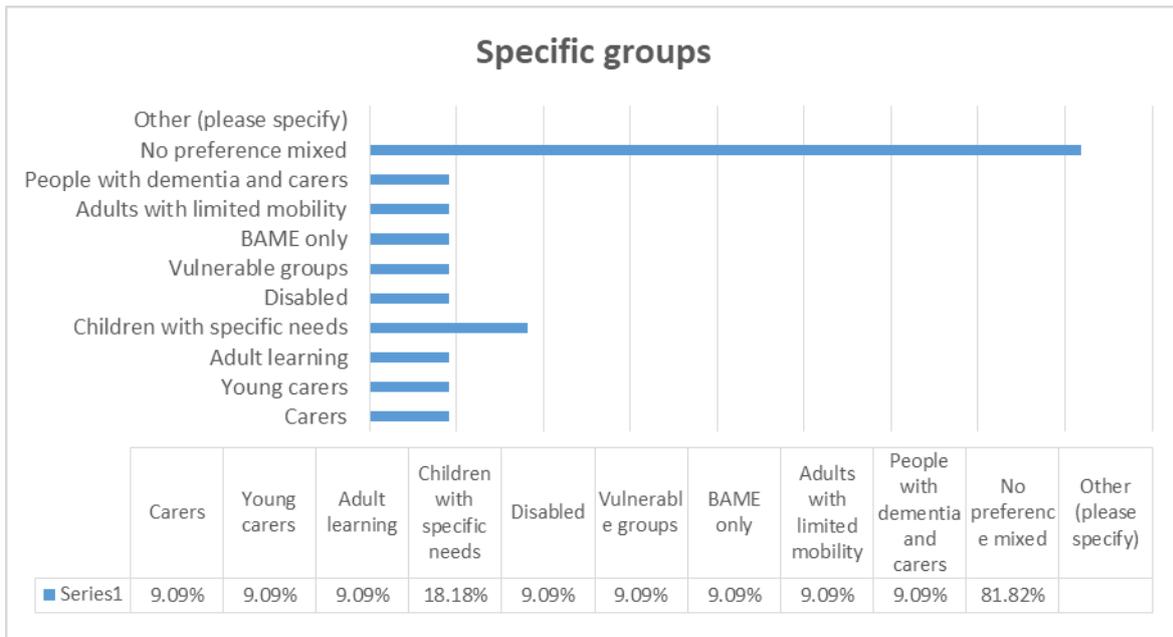
There was a preference (61.5%) for mixed gender groups, no respondents showed a preference for single gender groups or groups targeting specific gender issues. Nearly 40% of respondents did not indicate a gender preference.



5.5 SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS

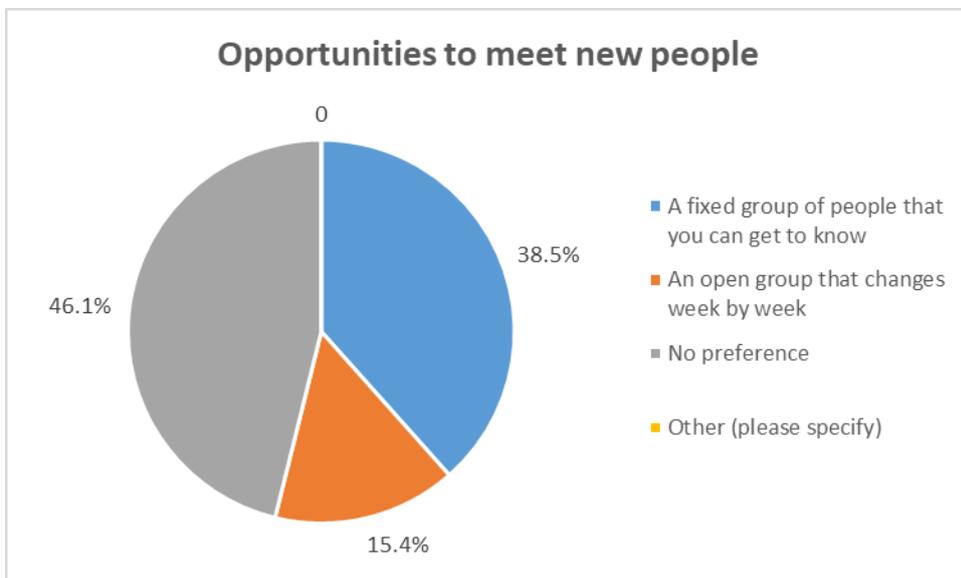
NOTE Respondents were able to choose more than one option so the total percentage shown is for more than 100%.

This question sought to understand if there was a need to deliver outdoor learning sessions to specific groups of people. Respondents showed a preference for groups that are mixed with no preference to specific characteristics, although there was some interest (18.8%) in sessions for children with special needs.



5.6 OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE FRIENDS

This question was aimed to understand more about the dynamics of group activities and whether it is important to offer activities to a closed group of people or to allow new people to join in the activities. Almost half (46.1%) of respondents did not have a preference, but a significant number thought that a fixed group who got to know each other was an important characteristic of the group. Some (15.4%) showed a preference for an open group that was more dynamic.



6 OTHER COMMENTS

The survey asked if there were any further comments. Only one respondent took the opportunity to make further comments and this was in the form of a question.

“Are programmes empowering or do they encourage dependency?- how to make them a springboard and make wellbeing a by-product rather than a target”.

This is explored further in the discussion below.

7 SURVEY SUMMARY

The survey was very limited in scope given the number of respondents who took part. All respondents had access to online facilities so were not completely isolated from the outside world as many of our regular project participants. This bias may be reflected in the analysis of the survey but we currently have no way of including these participants as national restrictions on face-to face group meetings are still in place.

Due to these exceptional circumstances we were not able to offer face to face workshops as planned in order to test participants' experiences, but instead relied on their perceptions of what that experience might have been.

Despite this we have made some progress in understanding how outdoor learning activities can be designed to benefit the wellbeing of project participants.

- Walking and rambling activities were seen to be beneficial
- Activities that stimulate the senses and that offer opportunities to socialise and build resilience were seen to be beneficial
- There was interest in nature based activities, environmental surveys and campaigning
- Learning about the work of other organisations and other opportunities available to take part in were also highlighted as beneficial.
- A programme with a mix of different activities was thought to be beneficial
- There was a preference for weekly meetings throughout the year with no breaks
- Group size should be between 5-10 people
- There was a preference for groups of mixed age, with some interest in intergenerational sessions
- There was no preference for gender-based meetings
- There was no interest for activities specifically designed for groups with specific characteristics, but there was a preference for mixed groups.
- There was some preference for a closed group that could get to know each other well, but interest by others in a more dynamic group that changes with each session.

8 ADDITIONAL PROJECT RESOURCES

The project also developed a suite of resources to support nature-based activities that can be used to help your health and well-being. They have been designed so that they can be done inside, in a garden or park. The resources can be accessed here: <https://www.lgoal.org/go-outside-and-learn/>
Topics that have been developed are:

- Autumn traditions
- Spiders
- Butterflies
- Grow a curry
- Wild flowers
- Butterflies and caterpillars

- Vertical Gardens
- Great Trees of London
- Trees for contemplation
- Trees in folklore and tradition
- The Rose Flower: a poem set to music
- The art of plants
- The art of bees
- Thinking about plants
- National Gardening Week
- Clouds

9 PRINCIPLES OF EMPOWERMENT

One respondent commented that any sessions designed to support wellbeing should be empowering rather than building a dependency. This is not something that it was possible to explore through an online survey.

Let's Go Outside and Learn seeks to empower project participants by establishing a trusted support network of people who have a positive shared experience through participating in outdoor activities.

The following factors will be included in future project design in order to ensure that there is limited risk of dependency and that sessions are designed to empower.

- Encourage choice and decision-making within the group
- Encourage participant involvement in the design of programmes in order to develop feelings of inclusion
- Encourage learning from each other - encourage everyone to be open to learning and developing including project leaders.
- Develop a sense of community and promote other community activities
- Encourage a healthy lifestyle with regular visits to nature and outdoor venues
- Encourage self-lead visits to nature and learning outside the programme
- Include confidence and resilience building activities within the programme
- Celebrate the small wins in order to build confidence.
- Encourage interactions outside the formal group meetings
- Encourage and embrace diversity
- Lead with positivity. Emotions such as hope and happiness are contagious and make it easier for participants to benefit

10 ABOUT US

Let's Go Outside and Learn CIC was established in 2015 and over the last few years has developed a strong ethos of working with vulnerable groups to encourage access to outdoor environments in order to benefit health and wellbeing, and to break down barriers to accessing parks and open spaces in the London Boroughs of Richmond and Hounslow.

By promoting learning outdoors, we aim to show the benefits that the natural environment can bring to improved health and wellbeing. Local parks and open spaces are a great place to bring people together, to learn and socialise. We encourage environmental stewardship in all our projects.

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August 2020

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