The Spiritual Forest
Connecting Traditional Faith Groups to Contemporary Urban Forestry
Case Study of a Green Prescription Model
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Scotland is beautiful and we have a lot of Nature!
• Population of Scotland is 5 million
• Most people live in the Central belt and the North East
• 1% of the Population (or 1100 individuals & organisations) own 70% of the land
The history of Scotland in context

• An almost complete removal of native woodland by the end of 16th Century
• Founding of The Forestry Commission in 1919
• A loss of ‘Forest Culture’
• The end of industrialisation and ship building meant high rates of unemployment and bleak futures.

• There was a huge disparity between the rich and the poor, and the negative consequences of this continues to this day.
Scotland has more drug deaths per capita than any European country.

- Highest knife crime in Europe (per capita)
- Increasing no. of drug deaths, the highest in Europe (per capita)
A health and poverty crisis:

- Highest knife crime in Europe (per capita)
- Record high no. of drug deaths, the highest in Europe (per capita)
- Highest Obesity rates in the UK (per capita)
- Highest Suicide rate in the UK (per 100,000)
- Increasing levels of prescribed antidepressants

Source: Cancer Research UK
Is our rich natural heritage the answer?

• Yes!
• Forests and nature are known to improve physical and mental health.
• Who has access to Nature?
• Barriers?
Objective No 3

*Increase the use of Scotland’s forest and woodland resources to enable more people to improve their health, well-being and life chances.*

Priority Action No 6

*Engaging more people, communities and businesses in the creation, management and use of forests and woodlands.*
What is Branching Out

• 12 week ecotherapy programme for mental health patients (in- and/or outpatients).

• A three hour session one day a week.

• Group of up to 12 people referred by a healthcare worker at a mental health service (NHS or charity).

• Fun and easy going programme to allow clients to build their skill set in a wide variety of areas
Activities

Activities carried out appeal to all ages and across all genders. Patient centred approach with a range of opportunities, including:

• Traditional crafts (wood working, weaving)
• Photography & environmental art
• Ecological surveys
• Bush craft
• Tool use
• T’ai chi
The Branching Out Structure

Scottish Forestry

Mental health practitioners

Training Courses

Outdoor professionals & Delivery Organisations

Mental Health Services

NHS Scotland Area Health Boards (10)
Training Courses

• Training course for outdoor professionals (3 days)
• Add-on outdoor skills course for healthcare professionals (2 days)

Pre-requisites to be a Branching Out Leader:
• Outdoor professional with work experience (Min 2 years)
• Mental Health First Aid
• Outdoor first aid certificate
• Optional Food Hygiene certificate
• Optional John Muir Leader certificate
• Public Liability Insurance
Successes

Delivered in 11 of Scotland’s 14 health board areas

22 delivery organisations

Over 300 graduates p/a

3200 participants since 2007

310 Branching Out Groups (April 2019)

5 Awards

Scottish Forestry / Coilltearachd na h-Alba
Programme Outcomes

- Programme cost effectiveness 2014/15: £17,300 per QALY, compared to NICE guidelines of £30,000. (Crabtree et al, 2016)

- Completion rate 2007 – 2018 is 71% (1890 participants)

- Adults with moderate to severe & enduring conditions show the most improvement.

- Focus groups (2007) reported 5 areas of improvement (Wilson, 2009)
  1. Mental wellbeing
  2. Physical health
  3. Daily structure and routine
  4. Transferable skills acquisition
  5. Social skills and networking
Future aspirations

• Embedding green prescription into the healthcare system
• Continued expansion of programme across Scotland
References:

