

Contact Information

New Forest and Test Valley
South Outreach Team

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Grace Ford

Poem

*I enjoy my forest walks
With people old and young
We amble along happy to talk
About the beauty we're among*

*The weather seems to shine on us
As we partake of nature's wonderful scene
There's never an argument or fuss
Just honest enjoyment, with everyone keen*

*The forest is full of surprises
With plants and animals galore
As the birds song reprises
We are all avid for more*

*Whether it be heath land or wood
The forest floor damp or soggy
We leave our walks feeling good
We're usually tired but happy.*

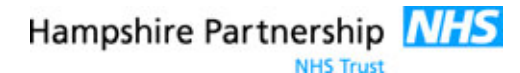
Julie Foy
03/06/08

I really wanted to say how much I've benefited from our walking group, meeting with like minded people, we leave our worries and problems far behind us, and just relish gods glorious creation.

Reduce Stress



**Forestry
Commission and
NHS Working
Together**



The scheme is a joint venture between New Forest and Test Valley South Outreach team and the Forestry Commission to provide walks, training and activities for mental health patients. It is jointly funded by the New Forest National Park Authority and Hampshire County Council.

The scheme came out of the 'Active New Forest' group which consisted of the local Primary Care Trust, Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council, New Forest National Park Authority and the Forestry Commission.

It started off with simple walks in the forest led by the FC or HCC.

This has developed into larger groups and sometimes finishes at a pub to encourage 'social' chat.

There have also been worthwhile activities, such as pine pulling, which has given a sense of ownership and caring.

It is hoped to develop some of the clients to plan and lead a walk.

- As a society we have generally become more individualistic, with weaker family and neighbourhood ties. People are connecting to each other less – and that greater isolation is mentally unhealthy. Our clients experience this first hand and lead lives that are very often isolated from the 'norm'.

- This is sometimes through choice, but a choice based on fear of people knowing too much about them and/or the effects of their illness. The walking group has helped break down some of that fear.

- Each time the group meets and grows people say 'hello', there is no pressure to talk and if we do it is about the walk, the scenery etc., and we have found individuals trust and security increases within themselves and within the group.

- The link between low activity and poor mental health is clear. Walking is linked to better cognitive function such as thinking, learning, remembering and judging things. Not only that but physical activity can alter mood and prevent depressive symptoms.

- About one third of our caseload currently attend the walking group. The ratio is one member of staff to three clients. There could be a potential for many more clients to attend the walking group if the staff were available.

- Group started with just a few clients and gradually built up to the current number.

- Social aspects –
 - Building confidence (talking to members of the public)
 - Taking in the environment (i.e. not looking at the ground)
 - Laughter (and laughing at themselves)

- Perseverance from team workers, lots of praise and time for the team to talk to clients on a 1:1 basis, and it has proven to be a time when clients talk more openly about their worries and fears.

One in four people in the UK will now experience mental health problems in their lifetime.