

***The significance of interpersonal relationships at
nature-based interventions on young people's
sense of self and long-term mental wellbeing***

Andy Harrod

***Lancaster Environment Centre
Lancaster University***

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Abstract

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The aim of my thesis is to critically explore how young people's long-term wellbeing is influenced by participating at a nature-based intervention. Nature-based interventions aim to improve participants' wellbeing by incorporating nature through regular, structured, and facilitated activities. There are growing concerns for young people's mental health and connection with nature. The prescribing of nature-based interventions is a growing area for providing support for people's mental health. There is a developing evidence-base regarding the efficacy of nature-based interventions in supporting short-term benefits to wellbeing. However, firstly, there are limited follow-up studies, so there is uncertainty regarding the longevity of benefits to participants' wellbeing. Secondly, less attention has been paid to how these benefits occur with the roles of the facilitators and participants being particularly neglected. To consider these aspects I developed a theoretical framework which engaged therapeutic landscapes with person-centred psychotherapy to explore the role of relational dynamics in people-place encounters. I engaged with a range of in-depth qualitative and creative research methods to explore with participants and facilitators their situated lived experiences of nature-based interventions. Firstly, I recognise the generative capabilities of facilitators and participants and the role of their motivations, intentions, and nature connection in co-creating affective therapeutic places. Secondly, I highlight specific relational qualities of facilitators and the agency of participants in engaging with these to co-create therapeutic encounters that offer respite and transformation. Thirdly, I highlight the long-term influences on young people's movement towards a fulfilling life through their developing sense of self, wellbeing practices, and life choices. Finally, I enhanced our theoretical understanding of the relational self in therapeutic landscapes. Specifically, I highlight why and how intra- and interpersonal

relational dynamics are involved in enabling place-based encounters, which can have a long-term influence on young people after and outside the original therapeutic event.

For Charley and Ellie, love always xxxx



Thank you, Charley, for being the best research assistant and the endless warmth, cuddles, and love throughout our time together.



Thank you, Ellie, for ensuring I had regular breaks through your demands for tummy tickles and games, and the gentle love you always offered during our time together.

*How can I be
What I want to be?
When all I want to do is strip away
These stilled constraints*

*And crush this charade
Shred this sad masquerade
I don't need no persuading
I'll trip, fall, pick myself up and*

*Walk unafraid
I'll be clumsy instead*

(R.E.M., Walk Unafraid)

A hunted man sometimes wearies of distrust and longs for friendship.

(J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring)

This process of the good life is not, I am convinced, a life for the faint-hearted. It involves the stretching and growing of becoming more and more of one's potentialities. It involves the courage to be. It means launching oneself fully into the stream of life.

(Carl R. Rogers, On Becoming a Person)

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Author's declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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Chapter 1 Introduction: Setting the scene

I have a scar. I remember the bow saw jumping as I dragged it back across the bouncing branch and onto my finger. More so, I remember my joy that day being amongst trees and people making a difference. ... Yet, I did not follow those beginnings and I found myself floating in existential angst. ... I remember focusing on the paint chipped window frames as I struggled with being met with kindness and compassion by a stranger. But, my world was seen and I felt an aliveness I had been missing return. ... I remember smiling with clients as I become that stranger. I loved co-creating with them therapeutic relationships that facilitated their movement towards their unique self. ... I remember crying upon the top of a hill after we had lost our baby. I was freefalling in grief. I kept returning to nature to untangle my growing losses. ... I remember the sense of excitement upon seeing this PhD advertised. An opportunity to combine my fascination with and care for people and nature to explore flourishing at nature-based interventions. ...

1.1 Nature and health

People have been encouraged to engage with nature¹ to support their health, since at least the classical Greek period, with green spaces, including gardens, used for healing patients (Gallis, 2013; Gesler, 1993). Facilitated engagement with agricultural and gardening activities has occurred within hospitals, prisons, and asylums providing routine, meaningful work, and calm, reflective spaces in support of people's mental and physical recovery (Hine et al., 2008; Parr, 2007; Sempik et al., 2010). Since the 1970s people with 'mental ill health' have been treated through community care initiatives including using established gardening and farming practices to provide opportunities for vulnerable people within communities to engage with nature for their wellbeing (Killaspy, 2006). This led to the development of social and therapeutic horticulture (Sempik and Bragg, 2013). The range of nature-based interventions has

¹ I consider nature as encompassing human and other-than-human species (e.g., animals, plants). For brevity, I use the term 'nature' throughout my thesis, whilst recognising nature represents individual entities, as well as the environments which are co-created through the dynamic interactions between different entities, co-creating multiple natures (Castree, 2005; Whatmore, 2002).

since expanded to include a range of natural places and nature-based activities, which incorporate environmental conservation, farming, adventure activities, and group exercise.

Researchers' engagement with nature-full places has been a core theme of geographical research into health enabling people-place encounters (Bell et al., 2018). Geographers have a long tradition of exploring how place impacts on people's health through considering: the characteristics of places, how people experience place, and the meanings people ascribe to places (Kearns, 1993). Geographical research into people-place encounters has highlighted a complex set of actants and relations that are involved in co-creating therapeutic experiences (Bell et al., 2018; Gesler and Kearns, 2002). Gesler's (1992) concept of therapeutic landscapes is a popular concept amongst geographers to explore and explain health-enabling encounters, through examining the interactions between the environmental, social, and symbolic aspects of a place in promoting healing (Bell et al., 2018; Kearns and Milligan, 2020). However, therapeutic landscapes research has typically focused on people's in-the-moment encounters with places (Willis, 2009). Consequently, whilst researchers have recognised the short-term benefits of respite, and the palliative aspects involved in people's experiences, there has been less focus on exploring longer-term transformational effects, including the transfer of beneficial experiences into people's everyday (Espeso, 2022; Kaley et al., 2019; Willis, 2009).

This focus on people's in-the-moment experiences has also dominated research into nature-based interventions, providing a broad evidence-base regarding the efficiency of nature-based interventions in beneficially impacting people's short-term wellbeing. This has led to proposals of 'A Dose of Nature' and the prescribing of nature to support people's mental wellbeing (Barton and Pretty, 2010; Mughal et al., 2022). These proposals are underpinned by the assumption that people have a universal relationship with nature, and that engaging with nature is unequivocally beneficial for people's wellbeing (Sumner et al., 2022; Wilson, 1984). However, there is uncertainty regarding the processes involved in influencing beneficial change, the sustaining of these

changes, as well as if these beneficial effects are consistent across the range of nature-based interventions (Stigsdotter et al., 2018).

The prescribing of nature-based interventions is a growing area of social prescribing, which provides community-based support for people (Robinson et al., 2020; Thomson et al., 2020). Social prescribing seeks to support people in taking greater care of their health, as well as reduce pressure on the National Health Service (NHS) through connecting patients to non-clinical sources of psychosocial support and activities within the local community, based on the kinds of support and activities which the person has identified as being important to them (NHS England, 2020). However, social prescribing can shift responsibility onto the facilitators of nature-based interventions to be sufficiently skilled in providing therapeutic environments and the participants to self-manage their health (Calderón-Larrañaga et al., 2022). Yet, the majority of research studies have neglected to critically explore the role of these two actants.

There are also concerns that people, especially children and young people are disconnecting from nature and spending less time outdoors, which could negatively impact their wellbeing (Louv, 2010; Moss, 2012; Richardson, 2023; RSPB, 2013). This aligns with a growing concern that poor mental health in particular is on the increase, with nearly two thirds of adults reporting they have experienced a mental health problem (Mental Health Foundation, 2017; Seers et al., 2022). Specifically, it has been proposed that young people are being unequally impacted, with an increase in mental distress most pronounced during the ages 18-24 (Jackson et al., 2023; Young Minds, 2021). These two sets of concerns have informed several national schemes to support connecting adults and children to nature for their mental health, as well as to support community and ecological wellbeing (Mental Health Foundation, 2021; RSPB, 2023; RSPB Scotland, 2022; The Wildlife Trusts, 2023). This has occurred through community and voluntary sector initiatives, for example, The Wildlife Trusts' 30 days wild (Richardson et al., 2016), and The National Trust's Noticing Nature Challenge (The National Trust, 2020), as well as through nature-based interventions, for example, The Conservation Volunteers' Green Gyms (TCV, 2023) and The Wildlife Trusts' Natural Health Service (Sendall et al., 2023).

The intentions behind the drive to prescribe nature formally and informally are well intended, but there are still gaps in our understanding regarding the processes involved in effective nature-based interventions and the longevity of benefits to participants' wellbeing. This is especially pertinent considering the focus on facilitators and participants in being responsible for the creation of beneficial change. Consequently, through this thesis I direct attention onto the participants and facilitators, who have largely been missing from critical discussions of nature-based interventions. To unpack their roles at nature-based interventions I will draw on a relational approach that engages therapeutic landscapes with person-centred psychotherapy. Engaging with person-centred psychotherapy enables me to explore the intra- and interpersonal dynamics involved in mediating participant's experiences at nature-based interventions. This includes exploring whether participating at a nature-based intervention can be transformational and whether this engagement can exert a long-term influence on a person's sense of self and wellbeing. Through using the example of nature-based interventions, I aim to draw attention to the processes involved in co-creating enabling place-based experiences, which support participants to develop their identity and support them to navigate their everyday across their lifecourse.

1.2 Positionality

My nature-connectedness began with a dog, called Sam, by playing in the woods, and cycling along disused railway lines. It has evolved and developed through falling in love with the Lakeland Fells and through supporting me to encounter the rawness and difficulties of my disenfranchised childless grief (Harrod, 2020a; 2020b). My reciprocal relationship with nature is rewilding my inner and outer worlds, through my recognition of, and living, an interconnected, complex, and dynamic life with all species (Totton, 2021).

"I seek to replenish myself through grounding myself in my places of belonging, places of more-than-human nature, where I nourish my being. Where I can unbind myself from my head, letting go of the to do lists, the promises and

deadlines and open my heart to the moment I am in. In those places I uncoil from the state of tension I have placed myself in and breathe. One breath, two, begins the shift. I notice the trodden path curving up the hill and follow it down to a couple of planks of wood bridging the stream. My curiosity awakens as I step across the bridge.” (Harrod, 2020b, p. 53)

The complexity in my interconnected sense of self and place in the world is especially highlighted during my experiences of untherapeutic encounters with nature and living with the hauntings of those (Harrod, 2020a).

“The crunch of rock under boot and I remember a Saturday afternoon. I had dragged myself here for a run. I wanted to run, but I also wanted nothing more than to stop, disappear and return to a world where I didn’t know this grief. I ran, I stopped, I ran, I stopped. Alone, on the gravel tracks I let out screams of anger, of despair, of sadness. Red grouse flew up and away. Those roars still echo. Roars, I need to let go of. This place is littered with my un-cried tears. The sadness of not being able to have children contained inside of me and projected out, casting this place in shadow. Here became isolating, frightening, because I was isolated and frightened, rattling with the question what could life be without children? I forced myself to hold myself together and it was all I could do to keep moving.” (Harrod, 2020a)

My developing nature-connectedness is one area which has a strong influence on my sense of self and influences how I view encounters with nature as having the potential to be beneficial to human and ecological wellbeing. Through my experiences I also understand that encountering nature is challenging and can be untherapeutic depending on our sense of self, perceptions, and lived experiences. The second aspect I wish to draw attention to is my training and experience as a person-centred psychotherapist, which shapes how I understand people, relationships, and wellbeing. Both factors were involved in my decision to apply to and undertake a PhD regarding nature-based interventions and how I approached and shaped my PhD.

I have long been fascinated by who we are and what it means to be alive and belong (see Harrod, 2016). A vital part of untangling this puzzle has been experiential, though the challenging removal of the masks I developed to fit in with people and societal norms. These masks whilst supporting me to adapt made me terribly unhappy too many times. As such, I consider our situated lived experience as where we begin to understand ourselves and others.

“At the start I asked you to offer love to the invisible, to feel what happens to you when you do this. What was your dance like? For me the dance involves untangling ourselves from the deception of our lives, developing awareness of our actions and taking responsibility for our lives. A dance that reaches out to not only others, but also ourselves. A dance of kindness and compassion, for to continually challenge the deception and be who you are requires this, it is also required to break down the internal shouting at yourself. A dance where we end up seeing ourselves and others too, all of us individuals, but connected and by relating to each other with kindness we as individuals can collectively flourish.”
(Harrod, 2016, p. 93)

Another significant aspect was finding Carl Rogers and person-centred psychotherapy, where I discovered a way to frame and understand my experiences. Firstly, this approach explained why I kept returning to my internal sense that I knew what was involved in a content life for me and fighting against the ‘shoulds’ of life. Secondly, it highlighted the role of relationships in that ongoing movement towards my authentic sense of self. Through my person-centred psychotherapy training I reached a personal and philosophical understanding that, for me, relationships are essential to support people to flourish as unique individuals and as part of communities. The other side of this is that relationships can also thwart a person’s sense of self, causing emotional distress, through the people involved exerting undue influence on who and what they think a person ‘should’ be and do. As, with Rogers (2007, p.1), I view person-centred psychotherapy as an “experiential way of being”, regarding how I live, and am accountable for, my life and how I relate to people. Subsequently, I strive to be congruent in my values, actions, and relationships and to have trust in myself.

Researchers' positionality involves configurations of situated and experiential knowledge which exerts an influence on the research process (Haraway, 1988; Valentine, 2002). This knowledge influences researchers' sense of self and how they relate to their research and the research process (Skelton, 2001). The researcher's positionality will influence their choices, practices, and the power balance between the researcher and the participants (Dwyer and Limb, 2001; Valentine, 2002). This includes their choice of theoretical, methodological, and analytical approaches, as well as whose voices are heard and represented. For example, the theoretical and methodological positions I take reflect my valuing of the knowledge each of us holds about what it is to be human and the aspects of our worlds that are important to us. Meanwhile, my nature-connectedness has been a useful source of lived experience for developing rapport with gateway organisations and participants, and demonstrating my genuine interest in nature-based interventions and desire to understand them.

The researcher cannot remove themselves from their research, but is intertwined through their interactions with the literature, participants, data, and the interpretations put forward as knowledge (Dwyer and Limb, 2001; Haraway, 1988). For example, my experience as a therapist led to an open and warm interviewing style, which facilitated participants to share deeply their lived experiences. Through a researcher being aware of the positions they occupy this situates the development of knowledge within the position of the researcher (Haraway, 1988; Valentine, 2002). For example, being aware of my nature-connectedness has influenced my desire for my research to be tangible: through my research I want to offer something back to the organisations and participants involved, which can support best practice and the development of nature-based interventions. This awareness has the potential to unsettle the power inherent in researchers' choices, practices, and claims, through increasing the transparency of those claims. This requires me, as the researcher, to be aware, reflective, and attentive to my influence on the research process and the participants.

Finally, through my position as a person-centred psychotherapist I understand mental wellbeing as an ongoing process of developing a sense of self that supports a person to

live well and be connected to the world around them. As such “we are all more or less maladjusted persons” (Schmid, 2018p, 79), in that we all experience emotional difficulties and distress, whilst moving towards more suitable ways to be in relationship with our self and others. As such, I approach mental wellbeing as a relational endeavour and an aspect of our movement towards a fulfilling sense of self. Subsequently, I reject and am opposed to the medicalisation of emotional/psychological distress and reducing people’s emotional expressions into categories of order and disorder (Sanders, 2018; Schmid, 2018). Psychiatric diagnosis categorises expressions as symptoms and then groups them into disorders. However, deciding which expressions are ‘normal’ is subjective and contextual, as such a psychiatric diagnosis is informed by social judgments, not an evidence-based medical opinion (Johnstone, 2019). Subsequently, the reliability of receiving the same psychiatric diagnosis from a different doctor is extremely low, reducing the validity of the diagnosis (Johnstone, 2014). Consequently, a psychiatric diagnosis is a label that describes a form of emotional expression that is judged to be unsuitable and not a ‘mental illness’. The language used to describe a person’s emotional distress impacts on how we understand, discuss, and respond to psychological distress (Sanders, 2018). Framing emotional expression as a ‘mental illness’ places an expectation on the person with the diagnosis to accept the position of a patient and to be treated by clinical experts (doctors, nurses) mainly with medication (Johnstone, 2014). This reduces the agency of the person, as informing a person they have a ‘mental illness’ locates the issue in that person, rather than viewing their emotional expression(s) as a suitable response to difficult and/or traumatic events and/or relationships. This in turn removes people’s personal meaning, as expressions are not discussed as responses to events, but treated as symptoms of an illness, stopping people from telling their story. Finally, psychiatric diagnosis can lead to stigma and discrimination, which can further alienate a person from their sense of self and society through a sense of shame. As such, I place myself within the biopsychosocial approach to mental health, and consider participants’ situated lived experience as key to understanding their mental health within their socioenvironmental context (Brown et al., 2018).

However, throughout this thesis I do engage with medicalised terms to refer to people's psychological distress, using these terms as a common language. Firstly, I do this because it reflects the language used by participants and researchers, and secondly, as it is beyond the scope of this thesis to critically interrogate the process of psychiatric diagnosis and the impact of this on being human. However, as I view psychotherapy as an empowering act rather than an agent of social-control (Schmid, 2014) I believe it is important to register my opposition. As such I place medicalised terms that are used to describe emotional distress in single quotation marks, to highlight that it is a social construct.

1.3 Research questions

Informed by the above context, the aim of my research is to critically explore how young people's (aged 16-26) long-term wellbeing is influenced by participating at a nature-based intervention. In considering this aim, I developed a series of research questions, which evolved through the research. These research questions are:

1. How do participants' and facilitators' backgrounds, motivations, and intentions influence young people's experiences at nature-based interventions?
2. What personal and relational qualities are involved in co-creating affective psychosocial processes at nature-based interventions?
3. How do the above factors influence the longevity of beneficial effects on young people's mental wellbeing from participating at a nature-based intervention?

1.4 Thesis structure

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 provides an in-depth literature review addressing nature-based interventions. This includes the current theoretical understandings researchers engage with to explain how participants experience beneficial changes to their wellbeing. I recognise further research is required to understand more fully the longevity of beneficial influences on participants' wellbeing and the psychosocial processes involved in co-creating beneficial change.

In Chapter 3 I turn to person-centred psychotherapy for its valuable insights regarding understanding the nature of a person and the role of interpersonal relationships in therapeutic encounters. I establish a theoretical framework that engages person-centred psychotherapy with the geographical concept of therapeutic landscapes. This facilitates exploring and explaining how participating at nature-based interventions can be transformational to participants' sense of self and wellbeing.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the phenomenologically informed qualitative approach I undertook. This includes my rationale for adopting this approach and my research design; discussion of the study participants, including the recruitment process; the methods I incorporated to co-explore with the study participants their lived experience; the process of data analysis; and my ethical approach.

The following three chapters present the empirical findings, each addressing the research questions above. Chapter 5 addresses the roles of facilitators and participants at nature-based interventions. I attend to facilitators' and participants' intentions, motivations, and backgrounds and the interplay between these in the co-creation of beneficial affective spaces. I highlight the importance of situating facilitators' and participants' engagement with nature-based interventions within their biography as fundamental to understanding the co-creation of therapeutic landscape experiences.

In Chapter 6 I explore the role of interpersonal relationships at nature-based interventions, highlighting the specific personal qualities that are involved in facilitating affective therapeutic environments. I also draw attention to how affective interpersonal relationships beneficially influence participants' sense of self and self-worth, which can enable the flow of benefits from an intervention into participants' everyday. Through this I contribute to our understandings of the psychosocial processes at nature-based interventions and how these can be transformational for participants.

Chapter 7 explores the long-term influences on participants' mental wellbeing. Here, I highlight the significance of participants' transformational experiences on informing an

authentic sense of self, values, and actions, which influences their sense of self and belonging in the world. Long-term changes include their study, career, and individual and community-based wellbeing practices. I also recognise that the maintenance and enhancement of beneficial long-term changes can be disrupted and how a person responds is influenced by the degree their wellbeing practices are mobile or embedded in particular affective places. Here, I contribute to our understanding of therapeutic landscape experiences as having an ongoing influence beyond the original therapeutic event.

In Chapter 8 I bring together the key findings from the preceding three empirical chapters, recognising my original empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions from my research. I conclude by considering the implications for practice and policy and with my recommendations for a future research agenda.

Through my thesis I have enhanced our understandings of nature-based interventions and the concept of therapeutic landscapes. Firstly, I have drawn attention to the role of intra- and interpersonal relational dynamics at nature-based interventions as a psychosocial process that underpins the co-creation of safe and transformative spaces. Through this I have recognised the generative capabilities of facilitators and participants, who are underrepresented in the literature, and propose they are significant actants in affecting transformational experiences for participants. The recognition of these generative capabilities occurred through situating participants and facilitators in their ongoing biography, which contextualised the short- and long-term significance of the role of relational dynamics at nature-based interventions. Secondly, these empirical contributions were complemented through enhancing our theoretical understanding of the relational self in therapeutic landscapes by providing a relational and growth-oriented image of a person from person-centred psychotherapy. This concept of a person highlights the generative capabilities of people by recognising people's tendency to actualise and capacity to self-heal when this tendency has been thwarted. As such I highlight why and how intra- and interpersonal relational dynamics are involved in enabling place-based encounters, which can have a long-term influence on people after and outside the original therapeutic event. These relational dynamics

can also account for the influence of people's wider socio-environment networks on enhancing or thwarting their therapeutic experiences and long-term wellbeing.

Chapter 2 Towards a geography of nature-based interventions: Identifying the known and unknown influences on participants' wellbeing

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I review the existing interdisciplinary empirical literature regarding nature-based interventions and the current theoretical understandings explaining how participants experience beneficial changes to their wellbeing. As I recognised in Chapter 1, geographers have an established history of exploring people and nature interactions and the influence of these on people's health. However, geographers' engagement with nature-based interventions is a fraction of the available studies, as such I draw on studies from environmental psychology, health and medical research, social work, public health, and environmental science to provide a comprehensive review.

I begin by providing a background to nature-based interventions, considering how the literature has categorised the types of interventions that are grouped under this term and defined the core components of nature-based interventions. I follow by exploring the research regarding the three core components of nature-based interventions: nature; meaningful activity; and social interactions, as influences on participants' wellbeing. Next, I consider how people-place interactions have been theorised and applied to nature-based interventions, including via the concept of A Dose of Nature. Then I draw attention to emerging psychosocial understandings through focusing on the role of facilitators and participants, who have often been neglected in studies, and the longevity of benefits from participating. I conclude by identifying the research gaps this study contributes to firstly, the longevity of beneficial influences from participation; and secondly, the psychosocial processes involved in co-creating beneficial change.

2.2 Nature-based interventions

There is a wide variety of nature-based interventions, including those that incorporate farms, gardens, animals, adventure activities or conservation practices, which aim to improve participants' wellbeing. Due to the broad range of nature-based interventions they are frequently grouped together under the umbrella term 'green care', which is often used interchangeably with the terms nature-based interventions and/or ecotherapy (Bragg, 2014; Bragg and Atkins, 2016; Bragg et al., 2013; Sempik and Bragg, 2016). Across the diversity of nature-based interventions, the contact with nature is viewed as the connecting framework, which is engaged with through the natural settings and through utilising natural materials for activities for the purpose of improving participants' wellbeing (Sempik and Bragg, 2013; Sempik et al., 2010).

Nature-based interventions provide a particular context for people to engage with nature – with the structure and facilitation of activities viewed as separating these interventions from everyday encounters with nature or health promotions that promote engagement with nature for wellbeing (Bragg and Atkins, 2016; Sempik and Bragg, 2016). Everyday encounters include gardening at home, daily dog walks in the local woods, or swimming in the sea as part of a person's lifestyle. People's reason for engaging with these everyday nature-based activities may vary, as may the aim of the activity. Health promotions include projects which are open to all and promote people's engagement with nature to increase their mental, physical, and social wellbeing, for example, gardening, environmental conservation, and green exercise schemes. Whereas an intervention is viewed as being specifically prescribed to a person for a defined health need. Bragg and Atkinson (2016) propose that this distinction will aid communication between nature-based interventions and with health and social care commissioners, supporting improved funding for nature-based interventions.

Consequently, the definition of green care has narrowed over time, moving away from the utilisation of animals, landscapes, and plants in interventions to promote people's wellbeing (Sempik and Bragg, 2013) to the provision of specifically designed

interventions for individuals with a defined need (Bragg and Atkins, 2016). However, Van den Berg (2017, p.2) argues that restricting the definition of nature-based interventions to individuals with a defined need is “artificial and confusing”, as in practice individual nature-based interventions are delivered using very similar approaches for a general or specific population (for a discussion of the facilitators’ role in personalising activities see section 2.4.2.). For example, The Conservation Volunteers offer a range of nature-based interventions (e.g., environmental conservation, gardening, health walks), which are promoted as both health promotion and socially prescribed programmes and are open to all people to join who wish to improve their wellbeing (TCV, 2023a). As such, these nature-based interventions are delivered in mixed groups of self-referred and referred people, supporting general population health via health promotion projects, as well as individuals through social prescribing. This diversity in group membership can be an important factor in providing peer support and social interactions that can beneficially impact on participants’ wellbeing (see section 2.4.3). Finally, people may also engage with a nature-based intervention to gain work experience as the activities offered are relevant to their chosen career path. Whilst this may expand the range of reasons why participants are attending an intervention; the delivery of the intervention remains the same. For the intention of a nature-based intervention is to improve people’s wellbeing and the development of skills and knowledge may be an aspect that contributes to improved wellbeing for some participants (see section 2.4.2).

Subsequently, I consider nature-based interventions as offering programmes for people with a specific need and/or health promotion projects for the general population. In both cases, the organisation’s rationale for offering a nature-based intervention is to promote a person’s wellbeing. As such, for my research I am using the following definition:

Nature-based interventions aim to improve participants’ wellbeing by incorporating nature through regular, structured, and facilitated activities (Bragg and Atkins, 2016; Sempik et al., 2010; Van den Berg, 2017).

Table 2.1 contains descriptions of the nine most common nature-based interventions offered in the UK as identified by Bragg and Atkins (2016). For all the interventions listed they are underpinned with the aim of improving a person's wellbeing through their engagement with nature via the specific activity.

Type of nature-based intervention	Description
Nature-based interventions considered by this thesis	
Blue Exercise, Green Exercise	Blue and green exercise is participating in facilitated physical activities, for example, canoeing, cycling, running, surfing, swimming, and walking, whilst at the same time being exposed to nature (Britton et al., 2020; Haubenhofer et al., 2010; Pretty et al., 2006).
Environmental Conservation	Environmental conservation is the delivery of facilitated and structured programmes involving the management and restoration of the natural environment and the development of participants wellbeing through these activities (Bragg and Atkins, 2016; Bragg et al., 2013)
Care Farming	Care farming is the utilisation of commercial farms, agricultural landscapes, and farming practices in the delivery of facilitated and structured programmes to enhance the health, social or educational wellbeing of participants (Bragg and Atkins, 2016; Hine et al., 2008).
Horticultural Therapy, Social and Therapeutic Horticulture	Social and Therapeutic Horticulture and Horticultural Therapy are facilitated activities, where horticultural therapists work with individuals, via the use of plants and gardening, to develop their health and social wellbeing (Thrive, 2018). Gardens are also used in therapeutic programmes, which are facilitated by a range of professionals and referred to as healing gardens, rehabilitation gardens, as well as gardening

	(Adevi et al., 2018; Carlson et al., 2020; Scartazza et al., 2020).
Wilderness Therapy, Adventure Therapy	Wilderness therapy involves participants undertaking a facilitated programme of educational, physical, and therapeutic activities in remote natural environments, for the development of their emotional, personal, and social wellbeing (Roberts et al., 2016; Sempik et al., 2010). Wilderness therapy involves the natural environment as co-therapist and the use of therapeutic techniques and sessions within this environment (Sempik et al., 2010).
Other available Nature-based interventions	
Animal Assisted Interventions, Animal-Assisted Therapy	Animal Assisted Interventions involves the planned inclusion of animals as part of the environment and/or the therapeutic or care process (Kruger and Serpell, 2006). Animal Assisted Interventions comprises of Animal-Assisted Activities, where participants have the opportunity to interact with the animals in the environment. The activities do not follow a procedure or have specific goals (Hassink et al., 2017; Kruger and Serpell, 2006). In Animal-Assisted Therapy specific animals are an essential part of the facilitated interventions with measurable objectives for the participant, who's progress is monitored and documented by a professional (Kruger and Serpell, 2006).
Ecotherapy	Ecotherapy is the application of ecopsychology. Ecopsychology claims that humans are inseparable from the natural environment and acknowledges the reciprocity between the wellbeing of humans and the natural environment (Buzzell and Chalquist, 2009; Roszak, 1993). Ecotherapists practice a range of facilitated nature-based activities, emphasising

	healing through contact with nature, where participants are encouraged to develop a reciprocal relationship with nature for the enhancement of their wellbeing and care towards the natural environment (Buzzell and Chalquist, 2009; Jordan, 2015; Bragg and Atkins, 2016)). The application of the principles of ecopsychology specified by Roszak (1993) distinguishes specific ecotherapy interventions from the broader use of ecotherapy as a term for all nature-based interventions, where the ethos of ecopsychology may not be applied in their delivery.
Nature Arts and Crafts	Nature arts and crafts interventions involve art and craft activities, where the natural environment is the setting and/or is utilised for materials, for example, clay, flowers, shells (Bragg et al., 2013).
Nature Therapy	Nature therapy is psychotherapeutic practice that occurs in the natural environment, with nature as an active partner in the therapeutic setting, process, and relationship (Berger and McLeod, 2006). Nature therapy involves the deliberate creation and use of rituals, where the involvement of nature can help clients develop meaning and facilitate change (Berger and McLeod, 2006).

Table 2.1 Types and descriptions of nature-based interventions listed in alphabetic order (Source: Author's own)

Three core components have been identified as characterising nature-based interventions: nature; meaningful activity; and social interaction (Bragg and Atkins, 2016; Sempik and Bragg, 2016; Sempik et al., 2010). Firstly, nature is considered to be engaged with by participants in three ways: being present in nature; being active in nature; and by shaping nature (Sempik et al., 2010). Being present involves participants being aware of the environment through their senses, for example during mindful sessions, where participants are encouraged to listen to the sounds of the environment

(O'Brien, 2018). Meanwhile, participants are active in natural environments, through running or walking during green exercise (Glover and Polley, 2019; Marselle et al., 2013) or taking part in activities, including building fires, canoeing, overnight hiking and rock climbing during wilderness therapy (Bowen et al., 2016; Conlon et al., 2018; Fernee et al., 2019). Finally, participants may shape nature, via cultivation: including working with crops at care farms (Rotheram et al., 2017); or growing vegetables and weeding during social and therapeutic horticulture (Diamant and Waterhouse, 2010); as well as via coppicing, footpath maintenance, and habitat creation at environmental conservation interventions (O'Brien et al., 2011).

Engaging with nature is reported to offer participants a sense of calm, fascination, psychological restoration, and connectedness to nature (Adevi and Mårtensson, 2013; Gorman, 2017c; O'Brien, 2018; Pálsdóttir et al., 2018). Secondly, these type of activities are deemed meaningful as they provide opportunities for participants to develop skills, gain a sense of achievement, and process and regulate their emotions, which supports their sense of self and improvements to their self-worth (Conlon et al., 2018; Fernee et al., 2019; O'Brien, 2018; O'Brien et al., 2011; Rotheram et al., 2017). Thirdly, nature-based interventions provide participants with opportunities for social interactions, through the activities provided and by working in groups, which support engagement with a diverse range of individuals and can promote a sense of belonging (Bishop and Purcell, 2013; Elings and Hassink, 2008; Harris, 2017). I critically discuss these three components in further detail in section 2.3.

Within the nature-based interventions literature there are very few studies which focus on the facilitators and recognise them as a component in enabling beneficial participation and improvements to participants' wellbeing. This is significant as the facilitator is considered as one of the distinguishing features of green care, as they facilitate the participants' interactions with the structured activities, nature, and their peers (Sempik and Bragg, 2016). However, when facilitators are considered, the researchers have drawn attention to the role of the relationship between facilitators and participants and the skills involved in facilitating safe, caring, and enabling encounters (Harper, 2009; Juster-Horsfield and Bell, 2022; Moriggi et al., 2020). Due to

the variation of nature-based interventions available, there is no one regulatory body overseeing the training of facilitators and the practice of delivering activities at nature-based interventions. Instead, different nature-based interventions are informed by various sets of practices and pedagogies, with the facilitators considered to be able to adapt the delivery of interventions to fit the context and requirements of specific clients (Sempik and Bragg, 2016).

Subsequently, critically exploring the personal qualities and skills of facilitators is required in order to, firstly, understand how facilitators meet participants with care and within relationships that support inclusion and a flexible approach to co-creating activities that meet individual participants' unique desires and needs. Secondly, to discover if there are common factors between facilitators of different interventions, which support similar therapeutic process across the breadth of nature-based interventions, and the grouping of them as green care. This could also confirm how facilitation distinguishes which interventions are considered green care.

Meanwhile, the participants have also typically been side-lined in discussions regarding their participation and wellbeing, especially through their personhood being reduced to a set of characteristics, including age, gender, health, or social status (e.g., McGuinn and Relf, 2001; Oh et al., 2018; Sia et al., 2020). For example, mental health improvements in participants' wellbeing are often reported as reductions in symptoms, which recognises the short-term influence, but the long-term influences on a person's personal development is unknown as there is uncertainty regarding the longevity of these improvements (e.g., Hitter et al., 2019; Kim and Park, 2018; Oh et al., 2020b; Pretty et al., 2007). As through researchers categorising participants based on a dimension of their identity, the participants' participation is de-contextualised, as such it appears the participants are passive receipts of interventions, rather than agentic in their motivations, choices, and co-creating their personal growth. However, one area some researchers have recognised participants' agency is in the social interaction through the development of friendships and the offering of peer support (McIver et al., 2018; Muir and McGrath, 2018; Rotheram et al., 2017). This consideration of participants as generative rather than passive requires further exploration, firstly, in

order to establish the influence of participants' lived experience on their participation and personal growth, secondly, to understand the role of participants as a co-creator of beneficial influences at nature-based interventions, and thirdly, to establish the longevity of influences and benefits from participation.

Within the UK, participants access nature-based interventions through various local and national organisations. There is no clear idea of the number of organisations involved or of the number of participants accessing these interventions due to the patchwork nature of this provision (Bragg and Atkins, 2016). Participants of nature-based interventions may have specific wellbeing concerns and be referred to the interventions by health and social care practitioners or schools with the aim of enhancing the participants' wellbeing (Moeller et al., 2018). Alternatively, many providers allow participants to self-refer when they believe their wellbeing will benefit from the intervention. The focus of nature-based interventions is on supporting participants to flourish: there is evidence that nature-based interventions work with a broad range of client groups and presentations, including addiction (Sudmann, 2018), autism (Scartazza et al., 2020), chronic pain (Selby et al., 2019), dementia (Ibsen et al., 2018), grief (Cacciatore et al., 2020), intellectual disabilities (Kaley et al., 2019), mental health (Bettmann et al., 2017; Han, 2017; Pedersen et al., 2012), refugees (Bishop and Purcell, 2013), unemployed adults (Ellingsen-Dalskau et al., 2016), and young people (O'Brien, 2018). As the therapeutic potential of nature-based interventions appears to be in part the focus on the whole person, rather than treating a particular condition, then considering the role of facilitators and participants, as noted above, is required to understand the processes that underpin this broad evidence base.

Finally, there is limited data on how nature-based interventions are funded and commissioned. Garside et al.'s (2020) report on nature-based interventions for Defra, report that nature-based interventions rely on third party funding, for example, charitable, lottery or corporate funding. This funding is typically for short-term projects, which creates a focus on short-termism and innovation, rather than developing capacity and scaling-up good practice. The repeated applications for competitive funding also place a time-burden on providers, especially smaller ones.

Meanwhile, within social prescribing the funding is for link workers, the people employed to connect people from the referrer to the project, rather than the projects people are referred to. Bragg et al.'s (2014) report on care farming for Natural England highlight a similar funding landscape, where funding for care farms was obtained from charitable donations, Local Authority Social Services, personal budgets, and self-generated income.

Meanwhile, Polly et al. (2020) report that social prescribing relies on the voluntary and community sector to deliver nature-based interventions, however the funding allocated rarely reaches the organisations delivering the nature-based intervention. Instead, organisations fund people's participation through the various sources mentioned above. As such, participants themselves do not pay, but with an increase in demand for places at nature-based interventions, there is considerable strain on organisations to be self-sufficient. The authors call for all organisations that receive social prescribing referrals to also receive funding that is long-term (e.g., five years) in order to delivery consistent, equitable, and reliable services. This precarious funding landscape is in stark contrast with the reported cost-savings nature-based interventions offer the NHS and related public health services, with Pretty et al.'s (2020) study estimating savings of £6,000 - £14,000 per person one year after participation and £8,000 - £24,500 after ten years.

Nature-based interventions are part of a long history of people's engagement with nature for the purpose of improving human health and wellbeing. However, how this occurs is not clear as nature-based interventions are complex assemblages where several potential factors come together, which can influence participants' wellbeing. These assemblages consist of a collection of diverse actants (e.g., people, vegetation, animals, material objects, values, and lived experience) which are involved in active and ongoing relational entanglements that co-creates a nature-based intervention (Bingham, 2009). As such, nature-based interventions are fluid and constantly being made and remade through the interactions between the various actants. Two of these actants are the facilitators and the participants, but before considering their roles in co-creating beneficial changes to participants' short- and long-term wellbeing, I will first

consider how each of the core components, nature, meaningful activities, and social interactions (Sempik et al., 2010) contribute to improving participants' wellbeing.

2.3 Relating to nature

As I have noted nature is understood to be the connecting ethos between the different types of nature-based interventions and a source of therapeutic potential in affecting participants' wellbeing (Bloomfield, 2017; Bragg et al., 2013). However, nature is understood and related to through the lenses of various complex concepts, which produce multiple representations and a diversity of natures (Castree, 2001; 2005; Hinchliffe, 2007), which influence how we understand people's encounters with nature and the impact on their mental wellbeing (Bell et al., 2019).

The dominant approach to understanding nature is the 'people and environment' perspective, representing nature as the environment, which is 'out there', external to and separate from human culture and society (Castree, 2001; Hinchliffe, 2007). Overlapping this perspective is the view that nature is fixed, stable, and singular with intrinsic characteristics (Castree, 2001; Lorimer, 2012). This presentation of nature as pure and distinct is itself a social construction and is linked to the Western concept of wilderness, as pristine and un-peopled nature (Cronon, 1996). Social constructionism understands nature to be the cultural representation formed by a particular culture, where the biophysical elements are modified by cultural practices and understandings (Castree, 2011; Castree and MacMillan, 2001). Nature is still viewed as being separate to humans, creating a nature-culture binary, but there are now multiple natures depending on the cultural lens. These representations represent the interests of that culture, and as with the 'people and environment' perspective, may mask particular ideologies or promote specific identities and ways of belonging to a group. Dominant representations of nature can occur and create places that are both inclusive and exclusive depending on the relationship an individual has with that culture (Castree, 2001). This, in turn, can influence how nature is prescribed for people's wellbeing (see section 2.5.2).

This nature-culture binary has been critiqued by geographers, with calls to recognise nature as being co-produced through the dynamic relationships that occur between different actants, which had typically been separated into either nature (animals, plants, soil) or culture (humans, concepts, objects) (Castree, 2014; Whatmore, 2002). The focus is on networks of actants that come together to create the things known as natural or cultural. Within the networks, the actants are in relationships with one another, where agency reside in the relationships between actants, including the other-than-human, which can also exert influences on the other actants in the network (Castree, 2011; Whatmore, 2002). The enmeshed relationships between the human and other-than-human actants create natures which are complex, heterogeneous, and dynamic, which have shifting effects on the actants involved, producing different experiences of nature (Castree, 2011; Hinchliffe, 2007; Whatmore, 2002). These different encounters provide people with a range of environmental affordances, which affects their engagement with nature and any subsequent benefits to their wellbeing.

Recognising nature as co-created shifts the focus away from viewing nature as a macrocategory and the a priori assumptions of nature and its effects, for example, nature as being innately beneficial for humans (Cronon, 1996; Taylor, 2011). Instead, we move towards understanding nature as a dynamic relational network, whose effect on people will vary depending on the actants involved in the networks and the agency which is produced through those relationships. Subsequently, focusing on the facilitators' and participants' encounters with nature will provide nuance accounts of the role of nature within their nature-based experiences.

2.4 Core components: Affective characteristics?

Studies have tended to report on the beneficial influences on participants' mental wellbeing at the time and related these impacts to the core components (e.g., Harris, 2017; Pálsdóttir et al., 2018). Whilst there has been recognition that 'safe spaces' are co-created through the combination of the actants present at nature-based interventions, researchers often report their findings in relation to specific core components (e.g., Howarth et al., 2021; Sudmann, 2018). As such, I critically discuss

the aspects separately to highlight their role in co-creating therapeutic experiences, rather than in combination as would be experienced by participants in practice.

2.4.1 Affective characteristic: Nature

I begin with nature, where studies highlight a range of nature-full environments can contribute to improvements in participants' mental wellbeing, including: allotments (Bishop and Purcell, 2013), farms (Ellingsen-Dalskau et al., 2016), gardens (Adevi et al., 2018; McGuire et al., 2022), parks (Rogerson et al., 2016), forest environments/woodlands (Mapes, 2012; Sonntag-Ostrom et al., 2015), wetlands (Maund et al., 2019) and wilderness (Bettmann et al., 2017). The significance of the natural environment has been recognised within green exercise studies, with improvements to participants' mood and attention, and reduced anxiety and fatigue attributed to the green spaces (Han, 2017; Mackay and Neill, 2010; Selby et al., 2019). Meanwhile, Barton and Pretty's (2010) multi-study analysis of ten green exercise studies, concluded that undertaking facilitated exercise in any of the green environments in the studies, including countryside, farmlands, urban greenspaces, watersides, and woodlands supported improvements in participants' mood and self-esteem. The authors noted that the presence of water further increased the benefits of exercising in nature. Thus, suggesting a range of environmental settings can contribute to improvements in participants' mental wellbeing. Thompson and Wilkie's (2020) study of blue exercise (canoeing, kayaking, open-water swimming, paddle boarding, surfing) discussed several reasons why the participants found being active in water therapeutic, which included: experiencing a meditative and calm environment, enjoying the wildlife and scenery present, gaining a sense of perspective from a different vantage point, and being away from distractions, for example, mobile phones.

The opportunity for participants to immerse themselves in natural environments different to their everyday experience has also been reported as an important factor in enabling change within wilderness therapy, with participants reporting changes in their emotional and physical wellbeing due to actively engaging with aspects of the environment, providing disconnection from technology, and moments of awe and

reflection (Conlon et al., 2018; Fernee et al., 2019). For example, Fernee et al.'s (2019) research involving 16-18 year olds with a mental health diagnosis, at a wilderness therapy intervention in Norway, demonstrated that participants were empowered to change through their choice to enter into an unknown and challenging wilderness environment. Within this environment, the participants reported improvements to their mood and feeling revitalised. Participants also reported reduced feelings of stress and pressures when actively moving through or by being in the wilderness. Meanwhile at a care farm, the outdoor setting contrasted to participants' previous experience of clinical settings, which supported participants to feel relaxed, safe, and to open up (Cacciatore et al., 2020).

The co-creation of safe and supportive environments at nature-based interventions is a common theme, with studies reporting the natural environment, alongside the social aspects (see section 2.4.3) contributing to the formation of safe spaces. Participants' perception that the natural environment is non-threatening can assist them in feeling welcomed, comfortable, calm, and accepted, supporting retreat from their everyday and facilitate emotional regulation and processing (Adevi and Mårtensson, 2013; Cacciatore et al., 2020; Harris, 2017; Pálsdóttir et al., 2018) Participants lived experience, as well as sensory experiences, can influence this perception, for example, phobias (see below), childhood experiences and paternal concerns (see section 2.5.2), and sensory experiences (see below). Pálsdóttir et al.'s (2018) study explored the factors involved in providing a compatible and supportive environment at the Alnarp rehabilitation garden in Sweden. Participants, with a stress related illness attended the garden for a 12-week rehabilitation programme involving group therapy, consisting of horticultural therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and psychotherapy. 59 participants who accessed the rehabilitation programme between 2007 and 2012 were interviewed about where they found supportive locations in the garden. The most important aspect was the provision of refuge, where participants felt safe and calm, enabling reflection, with hedges and planting providing shelter, but these spaces also need to provide a view of the garden and escape routes, in case other participants came too close. In these safe and supportive locations, also noted as being serene and rich in species, participants felt able to regulate and process their emotions. Whilst

specific locations were experienced as being particularly supportive, participants also stated that the whole garden was supportive, as different nature-rich spaces supported different emotional and sensory requirements during the 12-week programme.

Adevi and Lieberg (2012) propose, based on their research with caregivers at Alnarp, that participants' sensory impression of their chosen spaces supports their healing process as aspects of the space 'receive' their current mood and as such attracts the participant to that space. Through participants spending time in their chosen spaces, they develop self-awareness of why they are attracted to that space and how it relates to their current mood. This in-turn develops participants' self-confidence, which supports participants to venture into other spaces within the garden. These interactions with specific spaces provide participants with an uncomplicated relationship, which develops into a place attachment providing meaning and positively impacting their stress recovery process.

The presence of, and interactions with, animals has also been reported as facilitating participants in feeling welcomed and safe. For example, Gorman's (2017b; 2017c) study of care farms describes how participants felt welcomed by the animals, forming emotional bonds with them, and feeling as if the animals remembered them through their repeated visits, creating a sense of belonging. This promoted acts of nurturing, development of familiar and secure spaces, and facilitated social interaction with fellow participants. Additionally, the animals broke down barriers between participants and visitors to the site through the participants sharing their knowledge and skills by telling the stories of the animals. Meanwhile, Cacciatore et al. (2020) found that being amongst animals provided participants with spaces of reflection, emotional regulation, and connection at a care farm. For some of the participants the animals also formed the entry-point to accessing the care farm, as participants' understanding of the farm as a site of sanctuary for rescued animals helped to position the farm as a safe environment for them. Participants at care farms have also reported animals becoming confidants as what is shared stays with the animal (Cacciatore et al., 2020; Sudmann, 2018). Animals also provide participants with reciprocal opportunities with another living being, where they can develop trust, take care, and gain respite and relaxation

through their tactile interactions (Hassink et al., 2017). The farm animals at nature-based interventions are suggested as supporting participants' therapeutic experiences as they are perceived as non-judgemental, authentic, and compassionate (Hassink et al., 2017; Sudmann, 2018).

Participants' previous experience of animals has also been found to support participants to connect to animals for emotional regulation, which is especially valuable when participants have difficulties trusting other people, with the animals perceived as accepting them (Kogstad et al., 2014). Animals, for example, horses, can be considered as offering an alternative being for participants to relate to and to experience a safe, secure relationship, which may be different to their previous experiences of social interactions with humans (Dunlop and Tsantefski, 2018; Hassink et al., 2017). Animals, as well as a co-creating a sense of safety for participants from their everyday stressors, can also co-create lighter moments which are entertaining, for example, feeding ducks and geese that support participants to be present (Maund et al., 2019). However, the presence of animals may not always be conducive to a therapeutic encounter, for example, when phobias are a part of a person's engagement (Gorman, 2017a; 2017b). For example, at a care farm for many of the participants feeding the chickens was a therapeutic encounter, but for one participant her phobia stopped her engaging with the chickens, making it an untherapeutic encounter that she had to remove herself from (Gorman, 2017b).

Finally, environmental settings are rich in sensory experiences (smells, sounds, and textures), which can influence how spaces influence participants' wellbeing. Bell et al. (2023) recognises that the wider nature-based therapeutic landscape literature, primarily focuses on the visual aspects of environments in co-creating nature-based therapeutic encounters, sidelining the role of other senses. This has also typically been the case with nature-based interventions, with limited studies specifically considering the role of smell or sound in influencing participants' experience of nature-based interventions. For example, Gorman (2017a) considers the multiplicity of smells at care farms, reporting how the presence of 'smellscapes' affected participants' movements and choice of activities. Mud, dirt, and animal smells (e.g., chicken enclosures) acted as

a deterrent to encountering and spending time in particular spaces, which for some participants contributed to an untherapeutic space, which they did not want to engage with. Whereas the pleasant and various smells of different woods helped engage participants in a wood carving exercise. Meanwhile, Pálsdóttir et al.'s (2021) study at the Alnarp Rehabilitation Garden reports participants found smelling and touching plants helped to relive stress and evoke positive childhood memories, enabling them to feel joyful. Participants transferred this engagement with smell to their everyday to beneficially influence their mood, including using plant cuttings to create their own sensory garden at home. Finally, Cerwen et al. (2016) reports that sounds of nature (birdsong, water, vegetation) at the Alnarp Rehabilitation Garden had a soothing effect on participants and stimulated their memories of past enjoyable activities and important others. Participants referred to these natural sounds as quiet and silent despite the presence of noise.

From the existing nature-based literature, it is apparent that nature-full environments are considered by researchers as an affective characteristic of nature-based interventions, which benefits participants' wellbeing. However, as I have demonstrated this occurs through the participants actively engaging with the environments and animals present, with their lived experiences influencing their encounters. As such, situating participants' encounters within their biography, including their previous nature experiences, may highlight how participants' relational encounters with nature support the development of long-term nature-based practices, which in turn support their wellbeing over the lifecourse.

2.4.2 Affective characteristic: Activities

Activities vary at and between nature-based intervention and include: adventurous activities (Merenda, 2021; Puhakka, 2023), environmental conservation (Smyth et al., 2022; Wilson et al., 2010), gardening activities (Besterman-Dahan et al., 2021; Milligan et al., 2004), group exercise (Glover and Polley, 2019; Paddon, 2020), nature-based art and crafts (O'Brien, 2018; Wilson et al., 2011), and working with animals (Hassink et al., 2017; Murray et al., 2019). Activities are considered as providing a regular structure to

a nature-based intervention, and as meaningful through providing participants with opportunities for personal development through acquiring skills, achievements, and supporting their emotional regulation and processing, and sense of self (Bishop and Purcell, 2013; Elings and Hassink, 2008; Gibbs et al., 2022; Merenda, 2021). For example, Hanson et al. (2016) suggest that participants experienced walking together as meaningful as it became a shared practice with a sense of shared purpose as the participants worked towards their health goals. This movement towards shared and individual achievements was deemed more important than the social aspects.

The role of movement through natural spaces on improving participants' wellbeing is also reported in Fernee et al.'s (2019) study on wilderness therapy, which discussed that from physically challenging activity participants gained a sense of achievement, experienced increased emotional openness with fellow participants, and increased awareness of links between emotional and physical fatigue. Meanwhile, Leck et al. (2015) proposes that regular physical activity at a care farm improved participants' sleep, reduced their tendency to engage in unhealthy behaviours at home (due to feeling physically tired), and increased their everyday physical activity to support their mental health. Pitt (2014) in her study of community gardens proposed participants' engagement in activities created a sense of flow and relaxed the body via the participants becoming absorbed by the activity. Pitt consider this sensation of flow as a significant factor in the improvements participants reported to their wellbeing. This finding is echoed by Biglin's (2020) study involving refugees at a community allotment where the participants' absorption in the activities provided respite and/or a sense of work, which was important to the participants' identity due to being unemployed.

The facilitators' adaptation of activities to meet participants' needs is another factor in co-creating meaningful and beneficial activities, which engages the participants with the nature-based intervention (O'Brien, 2018). Through facilitators responding to the participants' needs and respecting their choices their engagement is personalised, which can increase the participants' belief in their own abilities, increasing their self-confidence and self-worth (Hassink et al., 2010; Kogstad et al., 2014). For example, Howarth et al.'s (2021) study of a garden-based wellbeing programme describes how

facilitators' attentiveness to participants' previous experiences, interests, and skills, feeds into the co-creation of activities on site, which empowers participants by acknowledging their unique selves, rather than focusing on their long-term conditions. The personalised activities contributed to improvement in participants' emotional wellbeing and a sense of belonging to the garden and community. This personalisation of activities could be a contributing factor to why the literature reports positively on the role of activities at nature-based interventions and there is little discussion on how engaging with activities may be difficult, uncomfortable and hinder engagement (e.g., see Fernee et al., 2019). The role of facilitators in meeting participants' needs highlights the significance of their role and requires further research to understand the skills and personal qualities involved in this approach.

Activities can also support participants' mental wellbeing by providing opportunities to learn new skills through learning by doing and being trusted to practise this new learning in a working environment (O'Brien, 2018). For example, Rotheram et al.'s (2017) study involving participants with a learning disability at a care farm, found that through the activities the participants developed a sense of achievement, their self-confidence, and a sense of purpose and meaning by realising their abilities and being given responsibility within a farm environment. Meanwhile, participants at an environmental conservation intervention reported appreciating the opportunity to learn new skills, which supported their sense of achievement and a sense of contributing to society through the conservation tasks (O'Brien et al., 2011). Parr (2007) also describes how gardening practices as part of social-welfare schemes enhanced participants' sense of community belonging and social status. This occurred through the participants' development of skills, by feeling valued and useful, the reduction in stigma regarding their 'difference', and the development of new capabilities through creating aesthetically pleasing urban green spaces. Finally, for some of the refugees participating at the Alnarp Rehabilitation Garden the activities supported them to integrate into the local community, for example, through learning how to cook Swedish dishes with the food they had harvested (Ekstam et al., 2021). However, the authors also report that for other participants the benefits they gained from the activities soon dissipated, sometimes as soon as on the journey home, as

their everyday life returned to view. This echoes Kaley et al.'s (2019) suggestion that the participants' wider socio-environmental context needs to be ascertained to understand the processes involved in transferring or preventing the transfer of the wellbeing resulting from beneficial experiences into participants' daily lives. As such, contextualising participants' experience within their everyday is important to understand how long-term benefits may form and are sustained over the participants' lifecourse.

2.4.3 Affective characteristic: Social Interactions

Nature-based interventions offer participants the opportunity for regular social interaction with a diverse range of people away from their everyday relations and places they inhabit (Bishop and Purcell, 2013; Elings and Hassink, 2008). These peer groups offer participants reciprocal interactions, including offering and receiving understanding, support, knowledge, and sharing skills that co-creates a sense of inclusion and belonging, as well as fosters friendships (Cacciatore et al., 2020; Harris, 2017; Milligan et al., 2004; Rotheram et al., 2017). These supportive social networks contribute to the participants' perception of the nature-based intervention as offering a safe space (Cacciatore et al., 2020; Hassink et al., 2010). Participants need to feel safe for the intervention to be therapeutic as a sense of safety enables participants to engage with the activities and their peers, especially when participants are nervous being with other people (Howarth et al., 2021; McIver et al., 2018). Collins et al. (2016) note the importance of safe places where people with mental health problems can relate to others on their own terms, and find spaces that are private and calm. Such places can be considered to offer 'affective sanctuary' through providing a contained calming space that offers opportunities for empathic and non-threatening encounters with other people, as well as for personal reflection (Butterfield and Martin, 2016).

Two personal qualities recognised in fostering safe environments at nature-based intervention studies are acceptance and empathy. For participants to have their difficulties empathised with, supports a sense of being recognised and understood, which helps participants share their experiences and develop meaningful connections

(Adams and Morgan, 2018; Muir and McGrath, 2018). For example, Cacciatore et al.'s (2020) research at care farms with people affected by traumatic grief proposes that the participants formed an affective community by being able to relate to each other's grief. This depathologising of grief occurred due to the presence of empathy and acceptance of people's loss. Thus, relational warmth normalised the effects of grief, creating a safe space in which people's experience of grief was validated, countering the social isolation common with loss. Meanwhile, when participants' self-expression and interactions are not judged this enables participants to feel at ease and to be authentic, which removes psychological barriers and opens up honest conversations that increases the participants' self-awareness and aids their personal growth (Adams and Morgan, 2018; McIver et al., 2018). For example, at a care farm, participants appreciated their behaviours being accepted rather than negatively commented on as in their everyday, which fostered a sense of community and belonging, where they could be themselves (Elings and Hassink, 2008). This accepting community assisted participants to socially interact and develop their social skills, which was valued by participants who had socially withdrawn due to their mental health or addiction. Finally, Biglin (2020) proposes that an accepting and empathic presence can also be co-created through non-verbal embodied social interactions, for example, a smile, a nod, which co-creates a sense of place, countering social isolation and loneliness .

The value of these supportive peer groups has been highlighted in several studies. For example, Milligan et al.'s (2004) study of communal gardening for participants aged 65 years or over, suggests that through the formation of a peer group, older people were able to share knowledge and skills, and help each other with the physical tasks of gardening, which supported a sense of being valued and included. Some participants also developed friendships that provided social connection and support beyond the allotments. Meanwhile, Rotheram et al.'s (2017) study involving participants with a learning disability at a care farm found that participants made new friendships with other participants, providing supportive and meaningful interactions, and producing a space of inclusion at the care farm. These friendships, as well as the relationships with the staff were an important factor in supporting participants' attendance at the care farm. Harris (2017) also reports on the role of relational dynamics at a social and

therapeutic horticulture intervention. For new participants, at first, supportive peer interactions provided a welcoming atmosphere and sustained participation. Then, over time, several participants formed friendships that extended outside the intervention with participants regularly meeting up with one another. Finally, the authors noticed a shift in participants' engagement, away from participating to support their own needs to community building through helping others and contributing to the garden. A sense of belonging can counter social isolation and support participants towards integrating more fully within society (Elings and Hassink, 2008; Hassink et al., 2010).

A sense of community can also be co-created through the development of shared experiences. For example, Sudmann's (2018) research at a care farm, which includes equine-assisted therapy for drug users, reports the significance of participants learning to ride together. This includes through participants being attentive to the sensory environment and people and sharing their achievements. This sharing supported the development of an inclusive community, which enabled participants to return after a relapse. However, the formation of shared experiences may not always promote social wellbeing. Paddon's (2020) study of walking groups in recreational greenspace noted that for some participants the social contact available through walking together left them feeling excluded due to the formation of cliques. Alongside this, the type of social connection desired by participants also varied: for some everyday conversation was enough, whilst others preferred more meaningful conversation. When this was unavailable a detrimental experience was created as these participants found the social interactions unsatisfying.

As I have shown the social environments participants co-create through their encounters are considered an affective characteristic within nature-based interventions studies. Participants perceive these affective environments as different to their everyday social environment and the supportive and accepting interactions as enabling changes to their wellbeing. Whilst non-judgemental and empathic interactions have been recognised as being involved in the formation of supportive relationships, understanding how these and other personal qualities influence participants long-term wellbeing is still to be established. As such, researching the role of facilitators and

participants in co-creating affective relational dynamics may provide further insight into the interpersonal processes involved and how they effect changes in participants' personal growth.

2.5 Towards an understanding of nature-based interventions

Researchers of nature-based interventions have applied several theoretical frameworks to understand and explain participants' beneficial experiences. Two approaches dominate this theorising, firstly, I will consider the psychological restoration accounts from environmental psychology, which group Rachel Kaplan and Stephen Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan, 1995) and Roger Ulrich's Stress Reduction Theory (also referred to as Psycho-Evolutionary Theory) (Ulrich, 1983; Ulrich et al., 1991). I will follow by critically discussing the concept of A Dose of Nature, which developed from studies applying a psychological restoration framework. I will finish by exploring the second dominant approach, Wilbert Gesler's geographical concept of therapeutic landscapes that consider the social, cultural, symbolic, and environmental facets to people's therapeutic engagements with places (Gesler, 1992; 1993; 1996).

2.5.1 Restorative nature experiences

Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989) and Ulrich's (1983) restorative accounts propose psychological mechanisms for explaining the restorative benefits to people's wellbeing from contact with natural environments. I begin with Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989; 1995) Attention Restoration Theory that is based on a concept of mental fatigue, which occurs when directed attention, maintained by cognition, becomes fatigued through effort. Mental fatigue can be restored through involuntary attention, where stimuli are inherently interesting and engrossing and as such require no effort to maintain focus. Natural environments are proposed as spaces of such stimuli, with Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) proposing four components of natural environments that when present together provide restorative qualities. These are: 'being away' - from an individual's

regular environment; 'extent' - environments which are immersive provide a sense of being in another world; 'fascination' - the provision of varied elements that attracts involuntary attention; and 'compatibility' - the fitting of the environment with the activity, providing support to undertake the activity. Meanwhile, Ulrich's (1991) Stress Reduction Theory proposes unthreatening natural settings elicit positive emotions, which can reduce people's stress and/or maintain emotional arousal within an optimal range. The framework is based on Ulrich's (1983) Psycho-Evolutionary Theory, which suggests unthreatening environments (savannah, water) support human wellbeing, due to the evolutionary advantage of these environments in providing more favourable conditions for survival through the provision of food, safety, and water for early humans.

Attention Restoration Theory and Stress Reduction Theory align with Wilson's (1984) Biophilia Hypothesis, which proposes humans have an innate emotional affiliation with the other-than-human-natural environment (other species, natural landscapes/habitats) due to evolving adaptive responses within these environments during the majority of human evolution, which promoted human survival (Kellert, 2016; Wilson, 1984; 1993). These adaptive responses include both positive emotions (attraction, calm) and negative emotions (aversion, anxiety) to the natural environment (Ulrich, 1983; 1993). The positive aspects of this proposed innate affiliation have received plenty of attention within nature-based intervention studies, considering green exercise (Gibbs et al., 2022; Han, 2021; Marselle et al., 2019), gardens (Adevi and Lieberg, 2012; Pálsdóttir et al., 2018; Sia et al., 2020), and forest therapy (Oh et al., 2020a; Sonntag-Ostrom et al., 2015). These studies propose nature as a health resource, with the improvements in participants' mental wellbeing, due to being active in natural environments, attributed to participants' contact with nature. Consideration of nature as a health resource has led researchers to consider the impact of the type of activity (Fraser et al., 2019; Pretty et al., 2007) or the duration and frequency of an activity in benefitting a person's health (Han, 2017; 2018), leading to proposals of an optimal Dose of Nature (see section 2.5.2). However, from an environmental restorative perspective, investigations into people's negative responses to natural environments and how these impact people's experiences are lacking.

Nature-based intervention studies using an environmental restoration lens have largely focused on how being active in natural environments, compared to urban environments or indoor settings, elicits larger improvements in psychological and physical wellbeing. These comparative studies base findings on measures of mental health (mood, stress, self-esteem) and physical health (blood pressure, cortisol and cholesterol levels) taken pre and post the activity (Barton et al., 2012; Glover and Polley, 2019; Han and Wang, 2018; Johansson et al., 2011; Marselle et al., 2013). These studies build on Ulrich's (1984; 1991) and Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989) findings that scenes of natural environments were considered more restorative than built environments, with reductions in stress (Ulrich et al., 1991), shorter hospital stays (Ulrich, 1984), and improvements in functioning and restored directed attention (Kaplan, 2001; Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989) reported in their respective studies. Whilst the nature-based intervention studies mentioned above have moved beyond the use of photographs (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989) or videos (Ulrich et al., 1991) to occurring in natural environments, the findings are limited as the studies do not consider how a person embodies or relates to the activity and/or place. Duff (2011) suggests that because Attention Restoration Theory focuses on the psychological processes involved in cognitive restoration, it does not account for the specific qualities of healing places and how these are formed by people-place interactions. Aligning with Pitt's (2014) critique of Attention Restoration Theory as assuming a passive experience of place through not accounting for how participants shape a place through their embodied engagements with the activities and the space, as an influence on their wellbeing.

Researchers proposing restorative accounts also often take a disembodied stance on mental health, as a participant's health is often reduced to a diagnostic classification (e.g., 'anxiety', 'attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder', 'depression', 'exhaustion disorder', 'schizophrenia') and this label becomes representative of their mental wellbeing (Barton et al., 2012; Cerwen et al., 2016; Maund et al., 2019; Pálsdóttir et al., 2018; Stevenson et al., 2021). However, diagnostic labels provide only categories of descriptive symptoms, not biological, social, or psychological explanations regarding why a person is experiencing emotional distress and/or expressing specific behaviours

(Jackson, 2012). As such, the researchers do not consider how mental health, as with all health, is biologically, socially, and culturally constructed, which is embodied and related to through lived experience (Brown, 2018; Parr, 2008). In addition, people's health is in flux and contextual and not a fixed state that is easily quantified (Brown, 2018; Parr, 2008; Sanders, 2018). Through a reductionist approach to mental health, the researchers take a passive approach to people, homogenising individual experiences of health into decontextualised categories which do not reflect the multiple ways health is constructed, embodied, and related to. Thus, the effect of people's sense of health and agency on their encounters with place as a factor shaping their health is discounted.

Researchers using a restorative environment lens to understand and explain nature-based interventions have highlighted a connection between people, nature, and health. However, the connection presented is often disembodied through reducing people-place interactions to passive experiences and decontextualising the actants involved in co-creating therapeutic encounters. Hartig's (2021) recent expansion of the restorative framework attempts to draw attention to the relational dynamics involved by proposing that personal and/or community social interactions are a factor in people's engagement with natural environments. As people's relations will influence the potential of people's restorative nature-based experiences by providing resources (access, time, and support) for engaging with natural environments. However, whilst Hartig (2021) offers a more encompassing account, further consideration needs to be given to how relational dynamics influence therapeutic encounters and the range of therapeutic benefits, beyond psychological restoration. Before I explore these relational dynamics, I first critically discuss the concept of A Dose of Nature.

2.5.2 A Dose of Nature?

The concept of A Dose of Nature proposes a dose-response framework where nature is engaged for a fixed duration on a set number of occasions and with specific activity types and intensity to deliver the required health benefits (Barton and Pretty, 2010; Shanahan et al., 2016; Shanahan et al., 2015). The concept of A Dose of Nature is

viewed as providing a cost-effective tool in improving people's wellbeing and as a therapy with no apparent side effects (Barton and Pretty, 2010; Shanahan et al., 2015). However, the concept ignores the individual relational dynamics in the more-than-human encounters between people and nature, including how nature is conceptualised, embodied and experienced (Bell et al., 2019). Firstly, as it is based on research which standardises people and their practices. This standardisation risks excluding the variety of ways people embody, relate to, and conceptualise nature, as certain types of interactions with nature are normalised (Bell et al., 2019). Secondly, the research that underpins the concept of A Dose of Nature is informed by Wilson's (1984) Biophilia Hypothesis, which assumes people have an innate relationship and that engaging with nature is good for people's health, especially at a particular intensity, duration, and frequency. However, whilst it is recognised that the development of biophilia is dependent on learning, experience, and the available opportunities to engage with nature - meaning that individuals may require support within their societies and cultures to engage with nature (Kahn and Kellert, 2002; Kellert, 2016) - biophilia is still viewed as a 'universal truth' (Bell et al., 2019). As such, the concept of A Dose of Nature takes a reductionist approach to nature-health encounters.

However, places do not have a universal value or are inherently therapeutic as people's engagement with places are influenced by their perceptions, preferences, lived experiences and relationships (Collins and Kearns, 2007; Paddon, 2020; Wakefield and McMullan, 2005; Wilson, 2003). Subsequently, defining an appropriate Dose of Nature is challenging due to the range of influences on people's preferences regarding spending time in nature, including, cultural (perception of nature, exercise preferences), socioeconomic (access to and availability of natural spaces) and individual (age, gender, health) (Barton et al., 2016; Shanahan et al., 2019; Shanahan et al., 2015; Sumner et al., 2022). For example, Milligan and Bingley's (2007) research regarding young people and woodlands demonstrated that natural spaces' therapeutic value is ambiguous. The authors suggest that people's engagement with natural spaces is mediated by a person's prior experiences of woodlands, media (films, news reports), parental fears about unrestricted play, and aspects of the environment (soil, insects,

density of trees). Meanwhile, Madge's (1998) research in Jola, The Gambia, found that how people perceived and understood Indigenous medical practices and western biomedicine influenced how people access health care. For example, young people, who wish to be modern preferred biomedical approaches, as well as being constrained by their limited knowledge of Indigenous medicine practices. This connects to the perception of herbal medicine as being backwards with rich villagers not using them as it may affect their social status. However, for people who understand and/or have knowledge of Indigenous medicine practices, then these socio-cultural factors can aid cohesion within the community and continuity of their culture, promoting their psychological wellbeing. Subsequently to understand and explain people's affective encounters with places, requires considering how people's lived experiences and their perceptions of themselves, their health, other people, and the places they inhabit influences their encounters.

These multiple subjective, dynamic, and contextual factors decrease the usefulness of the concept of A Dose of Nature as a universal guide, nevertheless, the concept is still pursued as a means to provide recommendations to the public of the benefits of engaging with nature, whilst simplifying the complexities of nature engagements (Shanahan et al., 2015; Sumner et al., 2022). Sumner et al. (2022) proposes further quantitative and qualitative research is required to develop understanding of people's contexts and social practices in order to develop a larger dataset, from which individual preferences may be able to be generalised into a refined Dose of Nature that supports tailoring interventions. This aligns with Robinson and Breed's (2019) suggestion that understanding the context of how, where, and when nature works well for a variety of people requires answering in order to provide (cost) effective nature-based interventions to a diverse range of people. However, a core feature of nature-based interventions is that they affect participants and their wellbeing in multiple ways (Shanahan et al., 2019). Subsequently, I suggest that the complexity of the interactions between a participant and the various aspects of a nature-based intervention cannot be reduced to a standard dose. Meanwhile, Richardson (2019; 2023) propose passive contact with nature is not enough to maintain and enhance a person's wellbeing, instead the development of a regular and sustained emotional, sensory, and embodied

relationship with nature is required. As such, we need to understand how participation at a nature-based interventions affects participants' relationships with nature as a pathway to support their wellbeing at the time and over their lifecourse. To unpack the interactions between people, nature, and health at nature-based interventions, I turn next to the geographical concept of therapeutic landscapes.

2.5.3 Relational therapeutic encounters

Gesler (1992; 1993) proposed therapeutic landscapes as a concept to examine the interactions between the environmental, social, and symbolic aspects of a place on promoting healing. Since then, therapeutic landscapes have become a popular concept to explore the interactions that occur at nature-based interventions including care farms (Cacciatore et al., 2020; Gorman, 2017a; Kaley et al., 2019), environmental conservation (Edwards, 2022), gardens (Howarth et al., 2021; Milligan et al., 2004), therapeutic camping programs (Dunkley, 2009), and walking groups (Paddon, 2020). Gesler began by focusing on places that had a reputation for healing, picking places as case studies due to the wealth of data available, to support a thorough exploration of the factors involved in constructing a place as being therapeutic (Kearns and Milligan, 2020). These locations included Epidaurus in Greece and Lourdes in France. From the Epidaurus case study Gesler (1993) proposed the site supported healing due to a combination factors, including: the natural and built environment, which provided a place of refuge and safety removed from the everyday; the symbolism of religious beliefs; and the importance of the social interactions and activities which fostered a sense of belonging and facilitated people's understanding of illness and treatment. Gesler's (1996) case study of Lourdes also suggested the importance of location in facilitating people's sense of getting away from the everyday. This provides respite aided by a social context that is supportive and caring. Finally, people's experiences are influenced by how a place becomes meaningful and symbolic through its individual, historical, and social representations.

However, this early application of the therapeutic landscape concept, focusing mainly on extraordinary places and events, which also included national parks (Palka, 1999),

lead to a number of subsequent critiques of the concept. These critiques included firstly, that the focus was on places significant to Western cultures and viewed through these cultural lenses. As such, the therapeutic value of these place interactions are culturally specific, however, the findings are presented as having universal relevance, regardless of different cultural understandings of place (Wilson, 2003). Secondly, it has been critiqued for the focus on short-term extraordinary experiences in people's lives at the expense of understanding how a connection to everyday places supports people's long-term health (English et al., 2008). Thirdly, researchers' critique has considered that a focus on in-the-moment therapeutic experiences, which has led to a focus on respite and palliating emotional difficulties, contributes to the difficulty in establishing the longer-term effect of people's encounters with places (Willis, 2009). Subsequently, exploring the interplay between participants' daily lives, the intervention, and their personal growth, will aid developing a nuanced understanding of the long-term effects of participating at nature-based interventions. There was also concern that through researchers identifying the presence of particular phenomena, typically, natural elements, symbolic meaning, and the provision of sociality and/or solace to support wellbeing, then certain places were framed as intrinsically therapeutic, equating being with these places as sufficient for a therapeutic experience (Andrews, 2004; Conradson, 2005).

One of the major developments of the therapeutic landscape concept was Conradson's (2005) Relational Turn. The Relational Turn proposes that positive experiences stem not from the properties of the landscape itself but from the person's self-landscape encounter. Conradson approached the self-landscape encounter through a relational concept of self, drawing on psychological concepts that a person develops how to be and to act from relationships and events, which co-creates people's inner worlds, as well as exert influence beyond the original event (Conradson, 2005). These relationships and experiences are socially and culturally situated, which frames a person's thought processes, emotional expression, and development of meaning (Gergen, 2009). This process is ongoing so as well as a person's context, including personal history, memories, attitudes, and agency, influencing the encounter, how they are related to by others at the time of the encounter will also affect the nature of the

encounter. For example, Conradson's (2005) research involving guests at a respite care centre noted that one aspect of healing encounters involved guests' knowledge and experience of their condition being respected by the care assistants regarding what support they required and their mobility. Guests considered being met in this way was empowering as it acknowledged their variable experiences of their pain and mobility rather than it being viewed as fixed and feeling pressured to conform to well-meaning expectations of others regarding the support and management of it. Through their interactions at the respite care centre, many guests noted improved mood and energy levels, as well as a shift in understanding their self and their capabilities. As such, the benefits of a particular place or environment do not derive from the presence of aspects that characterises a therapeutic landscape, but rather a therapeutic landscape experience occurs through a person's unique interactions with the socio-environmental setting (Conradson, 2005).

A person's self-landscape experience at nature-based interventions will also be influenced by how a person engages with the activities. For example, Dunkley's (2009) study of youths at a therapeutic camping program foregrounds activities as formative for people's relationship to place, as well as their understanding and perception of themselves. Dunkley (2009) proposed understanding these spaces as 'taskscape', where meaning occurs through participants' engagement with place-based activities. Here the meaning ascribed to the place is influenced by the timing and quality of the engagement, and so is subject to ongoing negotiation. The dynamism of meaning making within natural places and how this influences a sense of self is supported by von Benzon's (2018) research with learning disabled young people, exploring their perceptions and experiences of nature. Von Benzon (2018) reports that through 'doing' the young people engaged with different environmental settings to develop free play, involving their imagination, the environmental setting, and their social context to co-produce practical uses of an environmental setting that provided opportunities for engagement. The provision of these opportunities occurs through multiple relational factors, which assembles an encounter, where the therapeutic value is co-produced between the participant and the social interaction, activities, and environment. At nature-based interventions the formation of dynamic taskscapes will be influenced by

the facilitator and their approach to facilitating participants' engagement, as well as the participants' motivation, sense of health, and identity.

Nature-based interventions can be prescribed to people through social green prescribing, where the focus is on supporting people to take greater care of their health through connecting them to community-based support, whilst also reducing the pressure on the NHS (NHS England, 2020). Personifying care can be empowering, for example, enabling disabled people to employ personal assistants, however it can also entrench longstanding social inequalities for marginalised people, who would benefit more from centralised and integrated care (Power and Hall, 2018; Wiles, 2024). Social prescribing policy aligns with the UK Conservative government's withdrawal from health and social care informed by neoliberal ideology and austerity policies (Brown et al., 2018; Power and Hall, 2018). This movement away from state intervention towards individualism and the commodification of health has resulted in financial cutbacks to national and local health and social care services and the decentralising of it, which results in uneven provision and unequal access. Community schemes that aim to fill the gaps in service has resulted in non-clinical spaces being engaged with for health, for example, allotments, gardens, libraries, and museums. This advocacy of personalised and local services shifts the provision of health and social care from the state to local organisations, which often rely on volunteers and/or non-health specialists to provide 'therapeutic' services (Conradson, 2003; Milligan and Wiles, 2010; Power and Hall, 2018). Consequently, geographers' focus has been on the relations involved in providing care within these non-clinical settings (Bondi, 2008; Milligan et al., 2004; Warner et al., 2013). This focus on relationships is especially pertinent for social prescribing activities, where the responsibility for a person's health is shifted onto the facilitators of nature-based interventions to be sufficiently skilled in providing therapeutic environments and the participants to self-manage their health (Calderón-Larrañaga et al., 2022). As such the facilitators' and participants' intra- and interpersonal qualities need to be considered as an influence on the co-creation of therapeutic landscape experiences (see section 2.6). Subsequently, the emphasis on relational understandings within therapeutic landscapes will support understanding and explaining participants' affective encounters at nature-based interventions.

2.6 Making space for psychosocial understandings of nature-based interventions

There has been a focus on ascertaining the in-the-moment impacts of participating in nature-based interventions on recovery and providing respite rather than considering them as spaces of transformation with longer-term influences on participants' wellbeing. This focus on the short-term has also meant that whilst the affective characteristics of nature-based interventions have been described and attributed to improvements in participants' wellbeing, less attention has been turned to the processes involved at nature-based interventions that co-create these beneficial effects. A recent 12-month follow-up study by Fernee et al. (2021) concerning wilderness therapy, proposes a supportive psychosocial environment, alongside time spent in nature, may be facilitating shifts in participants' awareness and acceptance of themselves and situations, promoting their agency and exportation of their sense of self towards fulfilling their potential. To understand the processes involved in an affective psychosocial environment requires incorporating two key actants of nature-based interventions that are largely missing from the literature: facilitators and participants. Subsequently, I will critically discuss the existing literature regarding the roles of facilitators and participants at nature-based interventions. I will follow by focusing on young people's engagement with nature-based interventions. Finally, I will consider the longer-term findings and the proposed processes involved in creating and sustaining these changes to participants' wellbeing.

2.6.1 Recognising the role of facilitators

A few studies have considered the backgrounds and motivations of facilitators. In Leck et al.'s (2014) study of care farms, the authors found that care farming was practised by established as well as new farmers, who had backgrounds in social work, teaching, and supporting adults with learning difficulties – this experience of working with vulnerable people provided a source of motivation. Some of the farmers were also motivated by their own personal experiences. The main motivating factor was the care farmer's desire to use their skills and farm to help people enjoy fuller lives as individuals and as part of society. The authors' findings align with Hine et al.'s (2008) suggestion that care

farmers are motivated by making a difference to vulnerable people's lives and supporting marginalised people to be included within society through sharing their farm, interests, and skills. Meanwhile, McGuire et al.'s (2022) research into community gardens found a connection to nature was a common factor amongst facilitators organising community gardens, developed through their previous experience of gardening when a child and then during their adult life. The facilitators recognised they received wellbeing benefits through gardening and that it had supported them through difficult health and life events. The facilitators' experiences of volunteering and social and environmental activism were also common motivating factors for developing community gardens. The authors report a range of motivations amongst the facilitators: a desire to engage participants with nature to help the participants develop a relationship with nature that supported their wellbeing and care for nature; to foster the participants' wellbeing through providing hands on and meaningful activities that also enabled community ownership through the development of greenspaces; and by being in a space in which they could enact social justice through care and environmentalism in order to combat social exclusion through creating inclusive and accepting spaces.

Moriggi et al.'s (2020) qualitative study into green care practices in Finland proposes facilitators' care for people and nature as a common factor that influences their practices and approach. The facilitator's care is informed by their own passion for being and working outdoors, as well as concern with social inclusion, and disconnections between people and nature and urban and rural areas. These concerns underpinned an inclusive approach that supports vulnerable and marginalised people to engage in meaningful nature-based activities that also provide social opportunities, education about, and a connection to, nature. The facilitators are also flexible in adapting activities to ensure participants find something suitable for them that enables their capabilities. This links with O'Brien et al.'s (2018) findings regarding the role of facilitators in shaping activities to suit participants as an important factor in engaging participants in the creative activities available at a nature-based intervention in England.

The facilitators also influence the fostering of safe and inclusive environments through non-judgemental, encouraging, and supportive social interactions, where participants are supported to engage at their pace to try new experiences (Bishop and Purcell, 2013; Crowther, 2019; O'Brien, 2018). For example, Kogstad et al.'s (2014) study of green care in Norway reports that the participants recognised the facilitator as a significant factor in facilitating beneficial changes, including improvements in self-confidence, self-awareness, and the development of skills, which supported the participants to return to school or obtain employment. The participants appreciated the facilitator listening to them, providing encouragement and advice- affective factors which recognise and value participants' work and assist participants' personal development (Murray et al., 2019; Steigen et al., 2022).

The development of safe and effective nature-based interventions also involves facilitators managing these dynamic physical environments through offering activities to participants which balance challenge with risk in order to support participants' engagement and development (Juster-Horsfield and Bell, 2022). This involves facilitators recognising the limits of their skills and being aware of their perceptions of participants. For example, von Benzon's (2017) study involving learning disabled young people reports how facilitators perceived the learning disabled young people as both dangerous and vulnerable. This resulted in limited opportunities for the young people to explore, enjoy, and learn to engage safely with the natural environment through a focus on bounded spaces and supervised activities focused on achievement in order to reduce risk. As such, the needs and the abilities of the individuals were discounted against the perceptions the facilitators held concerning learning disabled young people.

Overall, facilitators' motivation, values, and skills will influence whether enabling or disabling spaces are formed at nature-based interventions through their interactions with participants. In Harper's (2007) study of wilderness therapy, participants reported the relationship with the facilitator as significant, but it was found not to predict outcomes. As such the author suggests further research is required into the facilitators' personality traits and skills. Subsequently, delving deeper into facilitators' backgrounds, motivations, and skills through situating their experiences of facilitation within their

biography will help us to understand the role of facilitators in influencing the development of affective environments.

2.6.2 Recognising the role of participants

Participants' involvement at nature-based interventions have typically been described through considering them as part of the social interactions that occur as part of an intervention (see section 2.4.3). Whilst the role of participants in co-creating affective social environments has been acknowledged, contextualising *who* these participants are and understanding *how* they influence the social environment has been given little attention. However, when participants' participation is situated within their lived experience, researchers have highlighted the significance of events, memories, and relations involved in participants' lived and nature-based intervention experiences in affecting participants' interactions and wellbeing (Cacciatore et al., 2020; Muir and McGrath, 2018). The authors report in their respective studies that the participants' lived experience acts as a source of authentic and empathic connection, enabling peer support and personal development. Subsequently, research that explores, firstly, how participants influence their own and others' participation via understanding their motivations and intentions for engaging with a nature-based intervention, and secondly, the experiences and values they embody and bring with them, would help draw out how participants themselves contribute to affective social environments and their short- and long-term wellbeing.

Ferneer et al.'s (2021) 12-month follow-up study considers the role of the participants in co-creating their experience and in maintaining and enhancing the benefits to their mental wellbeing. The authors report that participants experienced improved mood, emotional regulation, and increased social interactions, as well as being able to adapt nature-based strategies to manage stress. Ferneer et al. (2021) propose this is due to participants developing greater autonomy and agency, which occurs due to improvements in their self-awareness and acceptance of self. The follow-up interviews suggest most of the participants have continued this self-growth and have been able to sustain the alternative narratives they had developed. This suggests that the

participants have engaged with a supportive psychosocial environment at the wilderness therapy and have also been supported to continue their own personal growth as they define it. The authors encourage further explorations of self-concepts to support understanding participants' engagements at nature-based interventions and the influence of these on participants' sense of self and long-term wellbeing.

How people are related to, not only influences the therapeutic effect of a place, but also the potential of the continuation of this influence into a person's daily life. Kaley et al.'s (2019) research at care farms goes beyond the place-based encounter to consider the influence of the experience on the participants' daily lives. The authors report two types of experience: firstly, where a person's experience at the care farm was supported by their wider socio-environmental relationships; secondly, where the care farm became a place of retreat from challenging circumstances. In the second example, fixed boundaries between the care farm and the participants' everyday life reduced the flow of wellbeing gains beyond the care farm itself. Kaley et al. (2019) argue therefore that a person's wider socio-environmental networks need to be considered when exploring the therapeutic potential of nature-based interventions.

Participants are not passive recipients, but are co-creators of affective environments and beneficial change. As such, to understand participants' experiences and the long-term effects of participating at nature-based interventions requires considering participants as situated in their on-going biography and the influence of wider socio-environmental relations on supporting or hindering participants' long-term wellbeing. Drawing attention to participants' motivations and intentions for engaging with a nature-based intervention, as well as the role of their lived experiences and values, will help us to understand the role of participants in influencing their and others' participation and wellbeing. This requires shifting focus from the core components of nature, activities, and social interaction and their role in providing short-term beneficial influences on participants' mental wellbeing, to exploring the formation of affective psychosocial environments and the influence of these on participants' ongoing maintenance and enhancement of their mental health.

2.6.3 Young people and nature-based interventions

Ascertaining the long-term value of affective psychosocial environments at nature-based interventions could be especially significant for young people (16-25). Youth is often considered a difficult time for young people as it involves a period of transitions, as well as developing a sense of self (Evans, 2008; Valentine, 2003). Whilst identity development and transitions occur across the lifecourse, youth is considered a particular period of transitional events including education, work, and living arrangements influencing the development of a sense of self that is increasingly independent and responsible for oneself (Valentine, 2003; Worth and Hardill, 2015). Youth transitions have traditionally been considered to involve a young person moving through defined stages occurring in a linear process away from dependency in childhood to independence as an adult (Evans, 2008). Under this concept, when a young person does not complete these transitions successfully, the blame for this failure is centred on the young person (Skelton, 2002).

However, this approach has been critiqued for not recognising: the agency of young people; negotiations involving the interdependency of significant relationships; spatiality; and intersections with class, ethnicity, gender, health, and sexuality in influencing individual experiences through providing support or barriers to developing as a person (Evans, 2008; Skelton, 2002). This intersectionality between a person's lived experience and structural factors affects a person's health and sense of self (Shim et al., 2015; Skelton, 2002; Viner et al., 2012). This includes influencing how young people respond to experiencing mental health difficulties. For example, stigma associated with mental health difficulties can stop young people seeking help and impact their social interactions (Langheim et al., 2015). Subsequently, there is recognition that to consider how young people negotiate various personal and structural factors, requires situating young people in their ongoing biography (Evans, 2008; Worth, 2009).

For young people, places away from home, school, or work, known as 'third places', can offer opportunities for relaxed and friendly social activities and interactions (de St Croix and Doherty, 2023). Third places are considered to provide informal, caring, and

inclusive spaces (Biglin, 2021; Fly and Boucquey, 2023), which for young people involve relationships with adults that are non-judgemental, open, and flexible (de St Croix and Doherty, 2023). In these spaces and through the relationships offered young people can experience being accepted and respected, which supports the development of confidence in their actions, sense of self, and belonging (de St Croix and Doherty, 2023; Matos et al., 2023). As I have discussed, nature-based interventions provide accepting, relaxed, and social spaces which support participants with respite, reflection, and personal growth. Within wilderness therapy studies, researchers have recognised the value of these third places for young people who experience ‘mental health difficulties’ and in supporting negotiating interdependency during youth transitions (Fernee et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2017).

Hooykaas (2022) proposes that for young people at risk (e.g., substance abuse, unhealthy behaviours, long-term mental health issues) natural places can provide young people with opportunities for personal growth through active engagement with places. Young people can often experience stress when they feel constrained and experience a lack of control over their lives, including during bodily changes. Hooykaas’ study involving adolescent girls engaged in wilderness canoe expeditions found that within the safe environment the facilitator provided, the teenage girls were met as autonomous individuals. Being treated as autonomous individuals enabled the teenagers to reflect on themselves, the activity, and the place, promoting shifts in their perception of themselves and improvements in self-worth. These beneficial changes to the adolescent girl’s mental wellbeing were accompanied by the development of transferrable skills, including developments in relying on their self and others in meeting and accomplishing challenging activities. This suggestion of the young people’s improved resilience is echoed by Britton et al.’s (2022) study involving young asylum seekers at a surf therapy programme in Ireland. Seeking asylum presented the young people with additional challenges to their mental health and welfare as they experienced a lack of access to outdoor activities, limited space, and mundane routines during Direct Provision². The authors propose the unfamiliarity of the sea, alongside

² Direct Provision provide asylum seekers with food, money, shelter, and medical services during the assessment period regarding their claim for refugee status.

the facilitators tailoring the surf therapy to the individual young person's aims and goals, led to the young people developing a sense of achievement, belonging, and empowerment. This supported improvements in the young people's confidence, resilience, and adaptability in encountering upheaval. However, the long-term outcomes on young people's sense of self and mental wellbeing from these nature-based interventions is unknown. As such, focusing on young people's situated encounters with a range of nature-based interventions could generate further insights into the role of affective psychosocial environments in influencing young people's sense of self and long-term wellbeing.

2.6.4 Longevity of the benefits of nature-based interventions

As I have demonstrated there has been a focus on the short-term impacts of participating in nature-based interventions on recovery and providing respite rather than considering them as spaces of transformation with longer-term influences on participants' wellbeing. However, the limited follow-up studies conducted have found that the beneficial changes that occur to participants' (of all ages) wellbeing during nature-based interventions can continue post attendance (Corazon et al., 2018a; Harper et al., 2007; Leck et al., 2015; Stigsdotter et al., 2018). Follow-up studies occurred between three and 18 months after participating at the nature-based intervention. At the time of searching the literature I did not find any studies considering a longer period than 18 months after the nature-based intervention.

Studies focused solely on young people's participation only involve wilderness therapy. For example, Roberts et al. (2017) found that the improvements in the young adult participants' mental wellbeing (reduced 'anxiety', 'depression', and stress) were maintained 18 months later. The authors propose that participants may have maintained these improvements as towards the end of the intervention there was a focus on supporting participants' transition from the wilderness environment and back into the community. Similar findings are reported by Bowen et al. (2016) at three months and Harper et al. (2007) at 12 months. These studies followed up adolescents attending wilderness therapy programmes and found that participants maintained

improvements to their mood, behaviours, school performance, and reduced suicidal ideation. However, both authors also reported a decrease in family functioning over time, with Harper et al. (2007) proposing that to maintain positive mental health and behavioural outcomes requires supportive transitions and aftercare, as well as the involvement of the family. The authors identified the role of the wider family as requiring further research, which links to Kaley et al.'s (2019) suggestion of considering a person's wider socio-environmental networks in understanding the maintenance and enhancement of benefits developed from participation at a nature-based intervention.

One-year follow-ups of participants (mixed age ranges including young people) attending rehabilitation gardens also report that the positive changes, which occurred during the nature-based intervention, were being maintained a year later. These included reductions in GP visits and long-term sick leave (Corazon et al., 2018a); reductions in stress, improved social interactions, increased contact with nature and creative activities (Pálsdóttir et al., 2014); overall improved psychological wellbeing, and decreased burnout (Stigsdotter et al., 2018). Meanwhile, similar findings are reported by Sahlin et al.'s (2014) 12-month follow-up study involving participants of a Nature-Based Stress Management Course (including gardening, mindfulness, and guided walks) that the participants maintained improvements to their wellbeing (reduced burnout and sick leave). The authors propose that a significant factor was participants learning about and developing nature-based tools that support their self-care through engaging in rewarding activities, which assists with stress relief and replenishing their energy. Another factor was the participants learning about nature during guided nature walks, which inspired them to walk in nature more frequently after the course. These findings align with Gittins et al.'s (2023) study involving a woodland-based intervention, which found that three months later participants had increased their engagement with woodlands to support their health. The authors propose that engaging with a nature-based intervention can reduce participants' barriers to engaging with nature through participants building confidence that they can manage in nature; becoming aware of the nature around them and their feelings in nature; for those who did not regularly engage developing a shift in perception that

nature is a space for them; and reconnecting participants with nature for those who had stopped previous nature-based activities.

As I have noted, Fernee et al. (2021) propose a supportive psychosocial environment may be involved in transformative experiences for young people at wilderness therapy. The suggestions of supporting participants to transition from the intervention into everyday life (Roberts et al., 2017), the role of supporting participants to learn activities to manage their wellbeing, and education about nature (Gittins et al., 2023; Sahlin et al., 2014) all support this proposal. That is an affective environment is fostered which supports participants to develop insights, self-awareness, and wellbeing practices that support their health. However, understanding the underlying process involved in the formation of affective environments and why and how participating with nature, activities, and other people in these environments creates changes to a young person's sense of self and wellbeing requires further in-depth investigation (Pálsdóttir et al., 2014; Stigsdotter et al., 2018). Finally, Hawkins (2016) proposes as nature-based interventions focus on participants' strengths and abilities then future research should align with this approach by focusing on participants' personal growth rather than on the reduction of symptoms. Therefore, a growth-oriented self-concept and process of wellbeing may be helpful in understanding the long-term effects from participating at nature-based interventions, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

2.7 Conclusion

I have outlined the state of research concerning nature-based interventions and their influence on participants' wellbeing. I have highlighted a developing evidence-base regarding the role of the core components of nature, activities, and social interaction in co-creating short-term benefits to participants' mental wellbeing. Researchers have demonstrated these core components are affective characteristics of nature-based interventions through influencing the development of safe and immersive spaces; providing structured and meaningful opportunities for skill acquisition; reciprocal social interactions that include participants sharing their lived experiences, knowledge, and skills; and supporting participants with emotional processing and regulation. However,

less attention has been paid to how through interactions these core components become affective, with the roles of the facilitators and participants being neglected. Nature-based interventions have also traditionally been framed as offering care and respite, rather than having the potential to co-create with participants transformative experiences. Subsequently, there are still unanswered questions regarding the longevity of beneficial changes to participants' wellbeing, and the underlying processes involved in influencing participants wellbeing during participation and over their lifecourse.

To further understand the underlying processes involved in co-creating affective environments at nature-based interventions and long-term wellbeing, one valuable source of explanation may lie in exploring the formation of enabling psychosocial spaces and understanding how these influence a participant's sense of self and wellbeing. This involves bringing to the fore the roles of the facilitators and participants, who have the potential to mediate participants' experience through their ways of relating to each other, nature, and the activities. We have some understanding of the facilitators' motivations, personal and relational qualities, which contribute to caring, accepting, adaptable, and supportive environments. Yet, why these personal qualities are important in shaping affective experiences has not been explored further. Meanwhile, whilst participants are recognised as a component of affective social interactions, less is known about participants' motivations and intentions for engaging and the influence of their lived experience on the formation of affective spaces and beneficial short- and long-term wellbeing. Situating facilitators' and participants' experiences of nature-based interventions within their biographies will provide context for their interactions and provide insights into the factors involved in affective psychosocial environments – specifically, how participants' sense of self and mental health is affected through participation, and beneficial changes maintained and enhanced over their lifecourse.

Finally, as I have demonstrated, nature-based interventions are complex and dynamic assemblages involving several actants that can influence participants' short- and long-term wellbeing. As such, I have considered two dominant theories to support

understanding the participants' experiences at nature-based interventions. Environmental restoration theories whilst highlighting a connection between people, nature, and health do not account for the relational dynamics involved in people's interactions with place, instead presenting a passive experience of place. The theories also only consider a particular dimension of wellbeing (psychological restoration), which does not help to account for the transformative potential of nature-based interventions. Meanwhile, therapeutic landscapes provide a concept grounded in exploring the relations between people, the environmental, cultural, and symbolic aspects of a place in promoting a sense of being well. Subsequently, therapeutic landscapes can provide a framework to explore the psychosocial processes at nature-based interventions. However, the relational self-concept presented in therapeutic landscapes needs further consideration in order to understand how relationships facilitate or hinder people's wellbeing. In the next chapter, I turn to person-centred psychotherapy in order to support answering my research questions.

Chapter 3 A person-centred approach to therapeutic encounters

3.1 Introduction

The therapeutic value of nature-based interventions lies in their approach to working with the strengths of participants - rather than concentrating on treating a particular condition - enabling people to participate and through their engagement, flourish. Person-centred psychotherapy also focuses on the person rather than a specific concern, by facilitating a person's personal development, enabling them to manage their present and future concerns with responsible and constructive actions (Rogers, 1942). Person-centred psychotherapy was established by Carl Rogers (1951) and is a personal growth and development oriented psychotherapy (Tudor and Worrall, 2006), which is now a major psychotherapeutic approach that has been demonstrated to be therapeutically effective (Elliott et al., 2021; Joseph, 2018). Rogers' approach to facilitating change involves offering a supportive and nurturing relationship in which the client is affirmed in trusting their own feelings and thoughts, determining their own paths to change (Rogers, 1951; 1959; 1961). As such, to consider the role of psychosocial environments at nature-based interventions I turn to psychotherapy, where the therapeutic relationship and the role of the client have been identified as consistent and significant factors in enabling change (Bohart and Tallman, 2010; Norcross, 2010). Specifically, I will consider person-centred psychotherapy in order to understand the nature of a person and why and how relationships influence personal growth.

I begin by exploring the relational qualities that have been described as being part of affective sanctuaries. Next, I relate these relational qualities to person-centred psychotherapy, firstly by considering the person-centred image of a person (self-concept), and secondly, the factors involved in affective therapeutic relationships, which help foster personal growth. I follow by critically discussing the critiques that are applied to all psychotherapeutic approaches and the specific critiques of person-centred psychotherapy. Then, I consider how person-centred psychotherapy understands the process of wellbeing and personal growth. I conclude by proposing

how engaging the concept of therapeutic landscapes with person-centred psychotherapy supports exploring and explaining psychosocial environments at nature-based interventions and how these environments have the potential to enable long-term changes to a person's sense of self and wellbeing.

3.2 Affective sanctuaries: A focus on relational encounters

Rogers (1957; 1959) proposed the therapeutic relationship as being co-produced between the therapist and the client. Within this relationship, Rogers suggested that the qualities of empathy, genuineness, and a non-judgmental attitude are essential, which when embodied and offered by a therapist consistently within a relationship, enables a person's ability to self-heal and actualise (maintain, enhance, and move towards growth) (Bohart, 2007; Mearns and Thorne, 2007) (this will be discussed further in section 3.3). Researchers have recognised these personal qualities within affective social interactions at a range of formal and informal caring spaces, including at cafes (Warner et al., 2013), centres for cancer care (Butterfield and Martin, 2016; Glover and Parry, 2009), drop-in centres (Conradson, 2003), hospices (Moore et al., 2013), and libraries (Brewster, 2014) – as well as at nature-based interventions, which I have highlighted in the previous chapter. Findings from these studies have emphasised the therapeutic value of providing supportive and warm interactions, where an absence of judgement, alongside empathy appear consistent in aiding the creation of a non-threatening space. For example, Parry and Glover's (2010) study of complementary care for cancer survivors recognises the importance of non-judgemental and empathic interactions in fostering a safe atmosphere, which aided people to talk about their experience and for their experience to be validated, promoting self-respect. This non-threatening way of relating provides people with social connection and a sense of being valued and recognised as a unique individual. In turn, promoting people's self-expression, self-worth, and belonging.

These affective environments are often considered as third places and/or affective sanctuaries. Affective sanctuaries propose how the material and social environment can provide non-threatening and contained spaces, which provide people with

opportunities to engage in empathic and non-threatening encounters (Butterfield and Martin, 2016). For example, to engage in conversations that helps a person to explore their understanding of and responses to their personal circumstances, as well as support them in reflecting upon their sense of self. The concept of third places further expands the social dimensions of affective sanctuaries. Third places are informal, accessible, and inclusive public places, which offer an alternative place to home (first place) or work (second place) (Biglin, 2021; Glover and Parry, 2009; Parry and Glover, 2010). Third places focus on non-demanding sociability, providing opportunities for people to form connections, develop friendships, receive and give emotional and personal support, and provide space for emotional refuge and personal reflection. Relationships are key to the formation of third places through being at the core of regular social interactions and through joint participation in activities (Fly and Boucquey, 2023). These relationships are valuable as they are non-hierarchical and caring, providing empathic, non-judgemental, and authentic interactions, which value each other's lived experiences, enhancing people's quality of life (Biglin, 2021; Finlay et al., 2019; Glover and Parry, 2009; Parry and Glover, 2010). As such, through third places people can feel included in their community and develop a sense of belonging, as well as be part of reciprocal peer support which can help people to understand, explore, and manage stressful life events.

Warner's (2013) study of a cafe focuses on the role of the owner in facilitating a caring atmosphere and highlights the significance of grounding people in the emotional warmth of a place. The authors report the cafe owner's willingness to create a friendly and inclusive social space for regular and non-regular customers alike, which counters social isolation. This included through the cafe owner's empathy towards the customers and listening to their stories with unconditional regard. Through the cafe owner listening without judgement this enabled customers to feel accepted and at ease. The cafe owner's caring approach also provided customers with social interactions, whilst also respecting their choice to sit quietly, with no constraints on their time in the cafe. In contrast to this, Thomas' (2015) research involving Danish women's engagement with natural environments for wellbeing revealed that, for some women, societal expectations of how to act and look in certain spaces stopped them

from engaging with them. This was due to a fear of being judged, constraining the therapeutic value of natural spaces. This fear of societal judgement has also been recognised by Parr's (1997) study exploring how people with mental health problems in Nottingham experienced the city. Parr recognised that people sought spaces in which they could express themselves without judgement from others, whilst maintaining an identity that is meaningful to them and not suppressed by the dominant discourse regarding how a person should present their self. As such, the degree to which interactions are empathically and non-judgmentally attuned to a person will influence whether social interactions support a person's wellbeing or hinder personal expression and/or wellbeing practices.

Through focusing on the social aspects of affective sanctuaries, I have highlighted particular personal qualities which are valued in the fostering of relationships which are warm, inclusive, and supportive. These personal qualities include empathy, non-judgemental acceptance, and respect. This supports the development of affective experiences through and in the encounters between people. The therapeutic potential of a place requires not only understanding the qualities involved in co-creating affective environments, but how and why these relational dynamics affect people's sense of self and wellbeing. Rogers' theory provides an explanation for why these encounters are affective. To unpack the intra- and interpersonal factors involved I turn to person-centred psychotherapy.

3.3 Person-centred psychotherapy: A radical approach

Carl Rogers developed the person-centred approach during the 1930's - 1950's, influenced by his own lived experiences, both personal and professional, regarding human growth (Barrett-Lennard, 2007; Rogers, 1961; 1980). Rogers first described the person-centred approach as non-directive therapy, this was in response to the prevailing climate in psychotherapy, where the therapist was considered the expert and would diagnosis, interpret, and provide psycho-educational advice to the patient (Sanders, 2007). Rogers (1951) instead viewed the client as the expert regarding their own actions and experiences and his approach to facilitating change was to offer a

supportive and nurturing relationship. Rogers used the term client rather than the prevailing term patient, in respect to the autonomy and self-responsibility of the person (Rogers, 2007). By referring to people in therapy as clients this was a shift away from the medical model (Kirschenbaum, 2010), through decentring the focus from the therapist and onto the expertise of the client. Building on Rogers' work there are now several modalities of person-centred psychotherapy (for an overview see Sanders, 2012), as well as developments regarding the role of the therapeutic relationship and the formation of psychological distress (e.g., Mearns and Cooper, 2018; Warner, 2018). Finally, Rogers' theory influenced the development of humanistic approaches to psychotherapy (Kirschenbaum and Henderson, 1989; Schmid, 2007).

There are an estimated 400 different therapeutic approaches, of which the humanistic/person-centred approach is one of the three major approaches, alongside the psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioural approaches (McLeod, 2013). I am engaging with person-centred psychotherapy firstly, as it is focused on facilitating people to grow, which is premised on the view of a person as being able to self-heal and as the expert of their lived experience and life (Rogers, 2007). Secondly, as person-centred psychotherapy is a relational approach that frames therapy as an encounter between (two) people, which facilitates a person's personal development through being-in-relation with another person and reconnecting them to their sense of self (Schmid, 2007; 2018). Thirdly, as person-centred psychotherapy is an experiential 'way of being', which comprises a set of ideas that establishes a philosophy for living (Rogers, 2007; Tudor and Worrall, 2006). As such person-centred psychotherapy has been applied within care work, education, group therapy, and social action (Henderson et al., 2007; Rogers, 1961; 1980; Schmid and O'Hara, 2007). Fourthly, due to the alignment between health geography and the person-centred approach regarding how health is understood. For, within health geography the body is recognised as both the site of a person's health and identity and the boundary between self and others. Where, alongside biological influences, a person's societal, cultural, and environmental interactions affect the co-construction of their body and health (Brown, 2018). As with the person-centred approach the person is recognised as an individual and a social being, whose embodiment of their co-created world influences their health and

wellbeing. Fifthly, aspects of person-centred psychotherapy have also been drawn upon by geographers previously, notably through exploration of the embodied therapist qualities involved in affective caring relationships, for example at drop-in centres (Bondi, 2008; Conradson, 2003). Finally, because of my lived experience and experience as a person-centred psychotherapist. I was particularly drawn to the approach's concept regarding people as having a tendency to actualise (move towards growth) and self-heal; as well as the role of relationships in thwarting and/or supporting people's sense of self; and that the process of being well involves an ongoing movement towards living authentically as an individual and in relationships.

At nature-based interventions the focus is on the whole person rather than directed towards treating an individual's specific condition(s), with the aim instead to work with participants' abilities and provide support, which enables participants to develop their sense of being well (Hawkins et al., 2016; Sempik and Bragg, 2013). Person-centred psychotherapy provides a relational, growth-oriented process, with a holistic view of the person and human wellbeing, which can support explaining the psychosocial processes involved in facilitating participants' personal growth at nature-based interventions. To understand person-centred psychotherapy's relational and growth-oriented process I begin by considering the person-centred concept of the person, before exploring Rogers' conceptualisation of the therapeutic relationship. I finish by critically discussing the critiques of person-centred psychotherapy.

3.3.1 A relational and growth-oriented image of a person

To explore how a supportive psychosocial environment influences a person's wellbeing at the time of an encounter and where this process leads, we first have to reflect on how a person understands their self. For this I will now consider Rogers' (1951; 1959) theory of personality and behaviour. Rogers' theory is organismic, treating the person holistically, with no separation into the dualism of body and mind (Sanders, 2007). At the centre of Rogers' theory of personality and behaviour is the actualising tendency, a biological force, which drives a person (the organism) to maintain, enhance, and move towards growth and differentiation (a process of recognising and becoming 'who we

are') (Bohart, 2007; Tudor and Worrall, 2006). This force is expressed through the organismic valuing process, whereby the organism values experiences within that specific environment that are beneficial towards survival and development as positive and detrimental experiences as negative (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Sanders, 2007). The actualising tendency responds to the environment the organism is part of and will adapt to proactively grow towards optimal functioning within that environment (Bohart, 2007).

To consider this: to begin with a child's experience of the world is undifferentiated and via the organismic valuing process the child will respond to experiences either through liking or rejecting them. Due to this process the child becomes drawn to valuing satisfying experiences. As the child develops they will begin to differentiate between self and not-self experiences, for example, I'm colouring, the cat is sleeping (Sanders, 2007). This is the beginning of a self-concept, a representation of who a person perceives and believes they are (Cooper, 2007a). As well as the organismic valuing process guiding responses to experience, Rogers viewed humans as having a secondary or learnt need for positive regard, which is the experience of producing a positive influence on another (Rogers, 1959). Through developing self-awareness, the child associates the need for satisfying experiences with positive regard from others. The need for positive regard can override the organismic valuing process as it becomes associated with actualisation of the self-concept (Sanders, 2007). This is known as self-actualization and involves maintaining and enhancing a person's perception of their self (Bohart, 2007). In other words, an individual can become reliant on looking for validation from others, at the expense of relying on their own judgement. As such, a person's self-concept develops based on their experiences and relationships, including how others respond to them.

If a child experiences a supportive environment, where a child's experience of their experiences is matched by the caregiver's responses then they develop trust in their own feelings and thoughts, enabling them to make choices based on their aspirations and perception of the world, known as an internal locus of evaluation (Mearns and Thorne, 2007). For example, if a child hurts their self whilst playing and cries and desire

comfort in response to the incident and then receives a hug from their caregiver, whilst also having their crying respected, then their experience is matched by the caregiver's response. This leads to the development of a self-concept (a cognitive representation) that aligns with the organism (the person), where experiences are accurately sensed, appraised, and acted on (see figure 3.1). This sense of self is also fluid and flexible, growing as a person progresses through life and with their moment to moment experiencing of the world (Sanders, 2007).

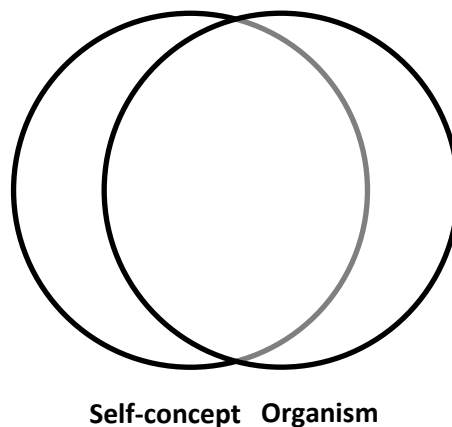


Figure 3.1 Pictorial representation of a person moving towards authenticity (Source: Author's own)

However, typically, a child's actions and desires are selectively responded to, depending on how they are accepted and/or valued by others. For example, caregivers may perceive crying as a sign of 'weakness' and so tell a child off for crying and seeking comfort when upset. Here, the child will respond to the need for positive regard and evaluate experiences based on the reaction from another rather than how they have experienced it (Cooper, 2007a). As such, when the child hurts their self, they may hold back their tears and desire to be soothed. This creates conditions of worth, where experiences are not evaluated depending on whether they enhance or diminish the organism but on receiving approval from others, creating an external locus of evaluation (Rogers, 1959). The conditions of worth become internalised as introjected values, that is values that come from someone else, but are subsumed into the self-concept (Sanders, 2007). As a person responds to the need for positive regard, they become estranged from their organismic valuing process, via denying and distorting their own appraisals of their experiences and by being guided in their decisions by

introjected values. Here, the child, based on their experiences with their caregivers develops a value that crying is inappropriate for them (and others). As such a self-concept that is out of kilter with the organism develops, leading to incongruence, which Rogers viewed as the basis for psychological tension (see figure 3.2). A person who is incongruent not only inaccurately symbolises their experience, but feels under threat by it as it does not match their self-concept. Thus, in order to protect the self-concept the person becomes more rigid and fixed concerning how the world is and how to be in the world (Sanders, 2007). Consequently, the child will deny or distort theirs (and other's) upsetting experiences in order to align their sense of self with the value of crying is weak, which could, for example, lead to personal and/or relational difficulties.

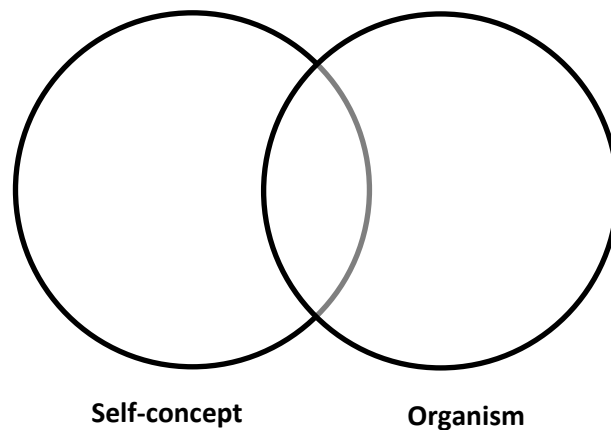


Figure 3.2 Pictorial representation of an incongruent person (Source: Author's own)

A person's self-concept develops through and with experience and in and with relationship. As such, whilst a self-concept may become fixed, it is possible for it to loosen and for shifts to occur towards a more authentic self-concept, within unthreatening relationships. A healthy psychosocial environment for a person is also the basis of Rogers' therapeutic relationship. The therapeutic relationship is considered as the therapeutic process for enabling change, rather than the expertise of the therapist, treatment models, and/or the pathologising of a client's experience through diagnosis (Sanders, 2007; Schmid, 2007).

3.3.2 Therapeutic relationships: an egalitarian encounter

Rogers' (1957, p. 96) paper regarding the necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change, proposed that if the following six conditions persist over a length of time then beneficial personality change will occur through the therapeutic encounter between the therapist and the client. Rogers viewed no other conditions as necessary.

1. Two persons are in psychological contact.
2. The first, whom we shall term the client, is in a state of incongruence, being vulnerable or anxious.
3. The second person, whom we shall term the therapist, is congruent or integrated in the relationship.
4. The therapist experiences unconditional positive regard for the client.
5. The therapist experiences an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference and endeavours to communicate this experience to the client.
6. The communication to the client of the therapist's empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard is to a minimal degree achieved.

Before I consider each of these conditions, I will clarify what Rogers meant by personality change, which is change where a person develops improvements in self-awareness, self-worth, reductions in internal conflict and vulnerability, and can more accurately relate to their feelings, supporting flexible actions relevant to the current situation (Rogers, 1951; 1957). As such, personality relates to a sense of self that is fluid, where actions and mindsets can shift. Whilst the conditions can be separated out to be discussed, they are not techniques, but interrelated in practice and the process of effective therapy. Through the therapist embodying the three conditions relating to them (congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding) they facilitate the contact and communication (conditions one and six) between the therapist and client through co-creating an enabling, safe environment focused on the client, who is experiencing emotional distress (condition two). In this environment the

client is unconditionally valued and supported to explore what is important to them and decide on meaningful change as defined by them (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 2007).

In practice this means meeting every aspect of a person with authenticity, acceptance, and empathy as the focus is on facilitating the growth of the person and not problem solving a particular issue. For example, when working with clients there is often an organisational or individual policy of not working with clients if they are drunk and/or to take a problem orientation approach through monitoring the client's drinking and working towards reducing and stopping their drinking. However, this problem orientation approach can end up working with the wrong issue. For example, Mearns and Cooper (2018) highlight that through focusing on the person and accepting that a client who drinks heavily may attend some sessions drunk and some sober, co-creates a therapeutic relationship that allows each aspect of the person to voice and explore their experience and so discover the underlying reasons for their drinking. The authors, through their example of working with a 'partial' drunk client, argue that by meeting the client as a person and not focusing on the issue of drinking, facilitated the client to understand the sense of aliveness he felt when he experienced deep sadness whilst drinking compared to the absence of feeling in his life when sober since his childhood. At nature-based interventions, facilitators support participants' choices and pace through adopting a flexible approach (Crowther, 2019; O'Brien, 2018). Considering the qualities involved in therapeutic relationships and the role of client's agency in co-creating them and moving towards the change the client desires, provides a framework for exploring participants' and facilitators' interactions. Specifically, how and why this facilitates beneficial experiences and the development of long-term wellbeing practices.

Rogers (1959) proposed that significant change to a person's sense of self requires a relationship. However, this relationship does not have to contain therapeutic qualities or depth of intimacy to begin with, but acts as the starting point for the encounter (Tudor and Worrall, 2006). The incongruence felt by a client refers to the dissonance between the organismic experience and how that experience is symbolised by the self-

concept, which affects how a person views and value their self, leading to emotional distress (Rogers, 1951; Tudor and Worrall, 2006). It is this psychological tension that may lead a person to seek therapeutic encounters. Within a therapeutic relationship, the client's perception and experience of being received, is perhaps the most significant condition to the process of therapy, as it is the client's perception that creates their reality (Rogers, 1951; 1961). The importance of the client's perception highlights that clients are agentic in the process of therapy, developing their own interpretations and taking what they need from the therapist's responses to support their aims for engaging with therapy (Bohart and Tallman, 1999; 2010). This relates to the client being considered as an 'active self-healer' and the most important factor in therapeutic change (Bohart and Tallman, 2010). Understanding people as active in their healing supports shifting the focus onto exploring and explaining the role of participants at nature-based interventions. Specifically, how their generative capabilities have the potential to direct the process and direction of their changes to their mental wellbeing at the intervention and over their lifecourse. Hence, focusing on participants encounters with nature-based interventions regarding their motivation, engagement, and changes in wellbeing and long-term wellbeing practices supports firstly, understanding the longevity of beneficial changes from participation, and secondly, the factors involved that enables a participant to develop and maintain these changes.

The following three conditions refer to the conditions assigned to the therapist. The condition of congruence refers to the therapist being authentic and transparent in their relationship with the client and having a genuine interest in the client and their experiences (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1957). Through being genuine the therapist expresses to the client that it is desirable to be yourself. Meanwhile, transparency from the therapist supports the client in looking inwards to their own experiences and resources for their answers and to not look for them from others. This can support the client in revising their sense of self and integrating their previous experiences as they were without distorting or denying them (Cornelius-White, 2007). Unconditional positive regard refers to a non-judgemental acceptance of all aspects of the client and their experience, which supports the development of a safe space for

the client to talk freely and openly about all aspects of their experience/distress/situation, without fear of rejection (Bozarth, 2007; Mearns and Thorne, 2007). Through a person being unconditionally accepted by another this can lead to the person developing self-acceptance and improving trust in their self and decision making. Finally, empathy involves sensing the client's world accurately, including the emotions and meanings the person holds about those experiences. Then communicating this understanding of their world to them (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1980). When a client is met with empathy and their self and experiences are validated, it reduces separation from others and supports belonging, through promoting empathy towards self and others (Freire, 2007). The combination of these three therapist conditions creates a depth of intimacy, where both the therapist and client are fully present in the moment, known as relational depth (Mearns and Cooper, 2018). This co-creates a sense of safety for the client, facilitating their exploration of a different way of being related to, which is not rejecting, but fulfilling, through reducing alienation and supporting belonging to humanity. Relating at depth also develops the client's hope in pursuing a different direction in life, and a feeling of engagement and aliveness in the world.

During my psychotherapeutic practice I met many clients whose desire to engage in therapy and for change was fragile. I would express my recognition of this heard or 'felt' fragility and for example, I would often explain how I felt an uneasiness in my stomach when they discussed their difficulties in attending and trusting me with their story. Alongside expressing my care for them, I was also open and honest that it was through developing a relationship between the two of us that we would create a space to hold, honour, and understand their stories. I would explain my willingness to accompany them, to 'feel' with them their world. Alongside my empathy and genuineness, clients recognised that I was accepting of all aspects of them, which often resulted in them telling me 'I was not normal', as I accepted, for example, their drinking, voice hearing, or compulsions without judgement or fear. I would express my concern for them regarding their behaviours and/or expressions, whilst also explaining we need to work with and not against these actions to understand the underlying reasons for their development. It was the accumulation of the risks that both the

clients and I took to meet each other as a person rather than hiding behind a façade of a therapist or client that brings a smile to my face now. It was these exquisite risks and my willingness to hold them with empathy, honesty, and acceptance that helped clients to stop drinking, to not act on their suicidal thoughts, to talk to their voices, and to live without shame. It is this lived experience that highlights to me the value in applying person-centred psychotherapy to understanding the role of facilitators and participants in mediating affective encounters. For example, when considering facilitators' caring and flexible approach, person-centred psychotherapy draws our attention to considering which personal qualities are involved and how and why these qualities make the approach affective.

As noted, the client is considered the expert of their own experience and an active participant in the therapeutic encounter. Rogers (1961) proposed seven stages of process to therapy, where clients will enter therapy at one of these stages. The stage of process a client is at may affect their motivation for engaging with therapeutic encounters and for pursuing change. These stages represent a continuum from rigidity and being stuck, to flow and in process regarding how a client experiences their life (Tudor and Worrall, 2006). As a client progresses through the seven stages of process, they become more agentic and autonomous, with their wellbeing improving as they relate more authentically to their experiences, feelings, relationships, and communications (Rogers, 1961). The client experience less psychological distress as incongruence is reduced between their experiencing of their world and their actions within it. This occurs because through the process of the client being unconditionally and empathically 'met', emerges feelings of belonging, of being trusted, of being able to be oneself without fear of reappraisals (Mearns and Thorne, 2007). A person's self-concept begins to align more fully with their organism, meaning the person becomes more authentic in how they experience and respond to the world, which reduces alienation and the unhealthy behaviours developed to cope with this estrangement from self and others (Rogers, 1961; 1963). Meanwhile, the client's locus of evaluation also shifts from external to internal as they trust responding to situations based on their own feelings and thoughts rather than through seeking approval and avoiding rejection (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1963).

For Rogers, the value of person-centred psychotherapy is as applicable outside the counselling room as in it (Rogers, 1978). To explore the importance of client perception and readiness, I refer to Conradson's (2003) research, which considered the influence of the volunteers at a community drop-in centre on the people who attended, through the lens of the conditions attached to the therapist. According to Conradson (2003) the volunteers offered the same qualities of empathy, acceptance, and respect to all attendees, but the therapeutic affect co-produced between the volunteers and attendees varied. For example, one attendee, Peter, whilst at first appearing cautious, developed confidence and self-worth through his interactions, noting he can be himself at the centre. This perception of being accepted, was also noted by another attendee, Rachel, who felt she was taken seriously and could attend regardless of her mood. However, this acceptance and empathic listening did not influence a shift in her self-concept, but provided her with temporary relief through receiving care and support. Whilst both experiences are therapeutic, Peter's appears more transformational as he was able to build on his experiences at the centre with other activities outside the centre (courses, fishing, getting a dog). These other experiences are likely to influence the therapeutic process, but are also indicative of a person trusting their own decisions, and becoming open to new experiences, more authentic, and socially engaged.

As I noted in the previous chapter, participants and facilitators have been neglected in research studies involving nature-based interventions, yet in therapeutic relationships, the equivalent of them, the therapist and client have been found to be the two most significant aspects in facilitating beneficial change (Bohart and Tallman, 2010; Hubble et al., 2010). Above, I have demonstrated the importance of considering how therapists facilitate therapeutic spaces through empathy, non-judgemental acceptance, and authenticity and why this co-creates beneficial changes for a client. For the client, I have highlighted how they are active in therapeutic relationships, shaping them through their ability to self-heal and their motivation and choices to co-create the beneficial change they desire. Applying person-centred psychotherapy to nature-based interventions could help explain the processes involved in co-creating beneficial

changes to participants' wellbeing and move our understanding beyond the describing of affective characteristics. Now, I have explained Rogers' image of a person and his relational approach to facilitating personal growth and how it applies to exploring and understanding nature-based interventions, I consider the critiques of his approach.

3.3.3 A naïve and optimistic approach?

As I have noted, person-centred psychotherapy began in response to the dominant approach of psychoanalysis, with Rogers placing great value on the client's subjective experience and tendency towards actualisation as driving the process of therapy (Rogers, 1951; 1959; 1961). Rogers also proposed that the therapist's expertise and techniques are not the core of successful therapy, but it is with and within the therapeutic relationship between the therapist and the client that healing and growth occurs in psychotherapy (Rogers, 1951; 1957; 1959; 1961). However, despite these proposals being based on empirical observation from therapeutic practice (Cooper, 2007a; Rogers, 1959; Tudor and Worrall, 2006; Wilkins, 2003), Rogers and person-centred psychotherapy has been criticised as firstly, being naïve and optimistic for holding the belief that people are inherently good and therefore does not account for or engage with destructive, hurtful behaviours (Cooper, 2007a; Wilkins, 2003). Secondly, that person-centred psychotherapy's theory of people and development does not account for different expressions of 'mental ill health' and therefore does not differentiate the different needs of a range of clients (Wilkins, 2018). Aligning with this critique is the critique of person-centred therapists' stance that the therapeutic relationship alone can be sufficient for change rather than specific treatment models (Cooper, 2007a; Wilkins, 2003; 2018). Finally, as with all psychotherapies, Rogers and person-centred psychotherapy have also been criticised for not engaging with the cultural, social, and political aspects involved in affecting a person's wellbeing (Russell, 1999a; 1999b; Smail, 2015). In the remaining of this section, I respond to the validity of these criticisms.

All psychotherapeutic approaches contain a view of a person, which informs the theory and practice of that approach. A view of a person includes conceptions regarding

motivation, personality development, role of relationships, why people suffer, and how people can be helped. Views of a person are also held outside psychotherapeutic practice, by each and every one of us (Schmid, 2007), influencing political ideology and social practices, which in turn promotes specific ways of being, which has implications for a person's personal power (agency and autonomy) as we shall see. The critique of person-centred psychotherapy's image of a person often involves misreading Rogers' work, as Rogers never wrote that people are fundamentally good, but instead viewed people as constructive, positive, and trustworthy (Rogers, 1989b). Rogers also recognised that people do behave in cruel and anti-social ways out of defensiveness and fear due to incongruence between the organism and self-concept (Rogers, 1961). These observations were in relation to how people are treated, in that if a supportive environment is provided then people grow in a prosocial direction and if not behaviours founded on defensiveness and fear can develop (Bohart, 2007; Cooper, 2007a). Consequently, person-centred psychotherapy can account for behaviours that are deemed 'good', as well as ones deemed 'bad' (e.g., envy, hatred, rage). Through a therapeutic relationship, which is non-judgemental, empathic, and authentic, clients are supported to explore 'bad' behaviours, whereby clients can move towards recognising these behaviours as an aspect of their self, developed through relational experiences and are subject to change rather than their essence and fixed (Wilkins, 2003). Within a medical model approach, 'bad' behaviours can become pathologised with a focus on symptoms and diagnosis by experts, which can objectify a person, reducing their autonomy and agency. Diagnosis can lead to a surface level approach, which does not tackle the roots of emotional distress, but instead focuses on management of symptoms rather than personal growth (Wilkins, 2018). As well as raising the question of 'who is diagnosis for?' and the issue of political and social control regarding people who behave outside of societal norms (Sanders, 2018).

The charge of being naïve and optimistic also relates to person-centred psychotherapy's understanding of the development and treatment of psychological distress, and as such does not differentiate treatment depending on the client's 'mental ill health' (Wilkins, 2018). This critique implies person-centred psychotherapy lacks a model of child development (biological, cognitive, emotional, and social) to

underpin therapeutic practice. However, this stance implies that emotional distress can only be understood through understanding child development, and does not take into account how emotional distress occurs due to inequalities in power and social relationships (see below for a discussion) (Proctor, 2015; Wilkins, 2018). Secondly, Rogers did develop *A theory of therapy, personality, and interpersonal relationships*, which accounts for a person's development, including during childhood, of healthy and dysfunctional ways of being and a process for moving from ill health to health (Rogers, 1951; 1959). This theory accounts for 'mental ill health' through the concept of incongruence, which occurs when there are differences in experiencing between a person's self-concept and organism, which is expressed as emotional distress through a person's thoughts, processing, and behaviours. Rogers' theory does not use the language of the medical model and psychiatric diagnosis, but it does account for distress and dysfunction as captured by the languages used in these approaches (Wilkins, 2018). Subsequently, person-centred psychotherapy argues that psychological distress occurs due to the relationships a person is part of, instead of being located in a person's personality type or traits or solely in child development (Proctor, 2015; Schmid, 2018; Wilkins, 2018). As such, the focus is not on symptoms (an expression of distress) or the grouping of these into a psychiatric diagnosis, but on facilitating the person to grow, enabling a person to cope with the present and later difficulties with more constructive and less confused practices (Schmid, 2018; Warner, 2018).

This critique relates to person-centred psychotherapy being criticised as involving being nice, offering sympathy and repeating back the last word(s) said by the client. As such, person-centred psychotherapy has been characterised as for the 'worried well' rather than for long-term and deep-rooted distress (Mearns and Thorne, 2000; Wilkins, 2003; 2018). Yet, person-centred psychotherapy has been demonstrated to work with people's fragile and dissociative processes, for example, 'schizophrenia', facilitating restoring or improving communication, leading to insights regarding past and present behaviours (Prouty, 2002; Van Werde, 2005), as well as improving social interaction, self-awareness, and resilience (Traynor et al., 2011). Mearns and Thorne (2000) propose this criticism is not only the result of misunderstanding person-centred psychotherapy, but that its subtle elegance in the belief in the person and the

therapeutic relationship is threatening for practitioners of other modalities. Far from being a passive and simplistic approach person-centred psychotherapy requires a depth of training due to the personal development required, as the therapist's self is integral to the therapeutic endeavour (Mearns, 1997). The therapist commits to the therapeutic encounter as an active, congruent, empathic, and self-aware person, which enables them to perceive and understand the client's subjective experience from the client's frame of reference, which facilitate the client's personal growth as directed by the client (Mearns and Thorne, 2000). The person-centred approach requires therapists to work skilfully with the client's own pace, process, and the consequences of understanding and integrating previously denied experiences into their self-concept, which can be confusing, difficult, and unpleasant for the client (Mearns, 1997). The person-centred therapist's commitment to the client's unique lived experience of their emotional distress and causes of that distress can lead to a swifter and richer understanding of their distress and through the relationship the answer the client needs (Schmid, 2004). Whereas, when a therapist is guided by models of psychopathology and focuses on symptoms, this can lead to a false sense of security in the therapist's understanding of the client and a problem driven approach, which may not address the client's unique circumstances (Mearns, 2004; Wilkins, 2018).

Person-centred psychotherapy promotes the encounter between the client and therapist as central to the process of therapy. Since Rogers' (1957) paper on the necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change, research has recognised that the therapeutic relationship is one of the four common factors in enabling successful therapy and considered necessary for therapeutic change (Duncan et al., 2010). Research further suggests that therapists who have more successful outcomes are better at developing therapeutic relationships, which includes through the qualities of empathy, acceptance, and genuineness (Norcross, 2010). Whilst Wilkins (2003) suggests, it is not limitations in the conditions that make them insufficient, but limitations in the therapist in being able to offer the conditions assigned to them. Within the debate regarding if the conditions are necessary and sufficient is the role of the client, who Bohart and Tallman (1999) considers as the forgotten factor in therapeutic change. Reviews of therapeutic research show that clients are not passive

and treated, but are active in influencing the therapeutic encounter, firstly, through their motivation, expectations, and beliefs, and secondly by processing their experiences and developing insight (Bohart and Tallman, 2010). Clients also link their therapeutic experiences and learnings with other aspects of their lives and interpret these within their world view (Bohart and Greaves Wade, 2013). This supports the idea that the client is an active self-healer and that the role of therapy is to provide an environment that activates the client's self-healing (Bohart and Tallman, 1999; 2010).

Whilst the client is agentic within therapy and it is their lived experience around which person-centred psychotherapy revolves, why a client is attending therapy does not reside within them, but a plethora of relational factors, including socially constructed structural inequalities present in society (including, gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability) (Lago, 2007; 2018; Tudor and Worrall, 2006; Wilkins, 2003). Person-centred psychotherapy, as with other psychotherapies has been criticised for focusing on the person and treating them rather than the cultural, societal, and political aspects that contribute to people's distress (Smail, 2015). Smail (2015) proposes that focusing on the person and the personal relationships they are involved in ignores the social environment a person is part of. A social environment Smail (2015; p.5) notes as "corrupt, exploitative and emotionally impoverished and damaging" and which perpetuates people's conduct to one another as unhealthy and detrimental. This social environment is socially constructed, which effects the exercising of power on people, including the effects of discrimination, stereotyping, and ideologies. However, person-centred psychotherapy's focus on people's relationships means the cultural, social, and political environment people belong to is recognised, but challenges remain to openly address the power imbalances people experience that form psychological distress (Wilkins, 2018). As such an awareness of how society is constructed and structured requires consideration by therapists, especially when working with people from minority groups (Lago, 2006; 2018). These requirements ask the therapist to consider how their identity, attitudes, and judgements are influenced by their position in society, and influence their language and behaviours (Lago, 2006; 2007). Writers regarding race (Lago, 2006), gender (Sugarman, 2017), sexuality (Mair, 2017), age (Sugarman, 2017), and disability (Parritt, 2017), all ask that therapists learn about the

minority client groups they work with, but also not to confuse the person with an aspect of who they are or if a particular aspect is the reason why they are attending therapy. Not only is it important for clients that therapists are aware of the role of structural inequalities on a person's life, but also for therapists to recognise that therapy is political.

Rogers viewed person-centred psychotherapy as political, not only in how power and control is considered in psychotherapy, but also in wider society (Rogers, 1978). Person-centred psychotherapy facilitates people's connection with their personal power, as in a person's connection to their internal locus of evaluation and trust in self, as a position from which to make decisions and act. From Rogers experience when people embraced this way of living it stimulated constructive change at personal and social levels (Rogers, 1963; 1989a). As such, therapy may support people to develop ways to engage constructively with social and political situations and respond to them in ways that are not detrimental to themselves or others. This may help mitigate the impact of them, as well as begin a process of societal and political change. Rogers (1978) considered person-centred psychotherapy as challenging the established orders of hierarchical treatment models and that it is a threat to the expertise and control held by psychiatrists and psychologists within the dominant medical model approach. This challenge to established political power is echoed by Kearney (1996) and Schmid (2014) that for therapists to be apolitical harms clients, maintains the status quo, and risks therapy becoming an agent of social control, rather than the self-empowering encounter it can be. As such, Schmid (2014) calls for person-centred therapists to be politically aware, to ensure therapy equips individuals to mitigate the impact of structural inequalities. I now turn my attention to considering what it means for a person to be well, and what this wellness looks like at personal and societal levels.

3.4 Wellbeing: A process of becoming of a person

Human wellbeing is a complex concept, which can be defined and understood in multiple ways (Atkinson, 2013). Inquiries into understanding the factors involved in 'a good life' typically date back to classical Greece and the proposals of hedonic

wellbeing, focused on a person's happiness and pleasure, and eudaimonic wellbeing concerned with a person's sense of satisfaction, meaning, and purpose (Atkinson et al., 2012). Wellbeing can refer to different aspects of our lives, including social, developmental, and educational, though it is often equated with health, specifically mental health (Atkinson, 2013; New Economics Foundation, 2008). The factors involved in a person's wellbeing include hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing from subjective (what matters to an individual, e.g., relationships, personal growth) and objective (aspects deemed to impact a person's quality of life, e.g., income, education, health) perspectives (Atkinson, 2013; Atkinson et al., 2012). As such, researchers have typically considered wellbeing through a 'components approach' to determine the economic, psychological, and social factors involved in enabling people to flourish. Subsequently, wellbeing is multi-dimensional and occurs at various temporal and spatial scales.

The focus of improving wellbeing is often located in the individual and focused on a person's subjective goals for improving their situation and feeling good about it, with wellbeing viewed as being obtainable, an endpoint, and fixed rather than a dynamic process (Fleuret and Atkinson, 2007; Smith and Reid, 2018). For example, the New Economics Foundation (2008) Five Ways to Wellbeing is aimed at supporting people to change their behaviours and provides five ways people can beneficially impact their wellbeing through their behaviours (New Economics Foundation, 2011). The five ways are Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning, and Give, and are promoted by the NHS to support people's mental wellbeing (New Economics Foundation, 2008; NHS, 2022). These suggestions target the individual to change their behaviours, which the New Economics Foundation suggests may lower the number of people with 'mental ill health' (New Economics Foundation, 2008). The New Economics Foundation (2011) proposes that the Five Ways to Wellbeing can be used to underpin community and organisational initiatives to improve community wellbeing, but it does not engage with the structural factors involved in people's wellbeing. Atkinson (2020) argues that this positioning of wellbeing as an individual endeavour has become toxic, where the responsibility for being well is centred on the individual rather than within society, with the structural inequalities experienced by a person which impact negatively on their

wellbeing, constructed as personal failings rather than due to political decisions and societal structures.

Whereas, framing wellbeing as an emergent process affected by the spatial context of a person's situation and their affective responses to the place and the actants involved in co-creating that place proposes wellbeing as a dynamic and relational process (Atkinson, 2013). Hence, wellbeing is not just an individual endeavour, rather a co-created process, which is an entanglement of human and other-than-human relationships, more-than-human spaces and places, a person's values and meanings, societal expectations, cultural meanings, and governmental policies. The interplay of all these factors can influence a person's wellbeing through affecting their capabilities, choices, and actions. The relationships people are part of, can also be a source of wellbeing, where wellbeing emerges through the quality of the interactions of the relating human and other-than-human actants and shifts over time as a result of the relationships an individual is part of (White, 2017). As such, a person's wellbeing can flux depending on a person's context and the shifting values and meanings attributed within that context and so their wellbeing does not necessarily stay stable overtime (Fleuret and Atkinson, 2007; Smith and Reid, 2018; White, 2017). Consequently, recognising wellbeing as being formed through complex and dynamic assemblages shifts responsibility away from individual acquisition of resources to focusing on how the social, material, and spatial aspects effect people's wellbeing (Atkinson, 2013).

Framing wellbeing also involves considering what it means to live well, as the components approach attempts to capture. As I am focusing on participants' mental wellbeing, I consider a person's quality of life from a person-centred psychotherapy perspective. As I discussed, person-centred therapists recognise a person's wellbeing is relational, including how it is affected by societal and cultural norms. Consequently, a person's difficulties are not viewed as personal failures, but the actions of a person surviving difficult circumstances, including social conditioning and societal inequalities (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Proctor, 2015). As such, a person's mental wellbeing is considered integrated in their movement towards *becoming* a person. Becoming is a process towards living authentically, which encompasses a way of being that is

meaningful, purposeful, and provides fulfilment through individual actions and with and within social relations (Rogers, 1961). Rogers' (1961; 1963) concept of the fully functioning person provides characteristics of a person who lives a 'good life'. The fully functioning person through improved self-awareness is increasingly open to experience and living each moment fully, and with an increasing organismic trust. These aspects support a person to be adaptable, creative, and constructive in their responses to situations. As such a person can be with painful and fearful experiences as equally as joyful and loving experiences, as they do not deny or distort their experiences to meet the demands of other people, rather the person's actions align with their organismic valuing process to maintain, enhance, and become. Rogers viewed the fully functioning person as in process, as fluid; the fully functioning person is not an end point, but is someone who is continually moving towards their potential. This supports the person to live authentically as a unique individual and socially – "meeting the needs and challenges of these relationships in interdependence and solidarity" (Schmid, 2018; p. 75). This is a significant point as Rogers viewed that a person's tendency to actualise needs to be balanced with the needs of others (Tudor and Worrall, 2006). As such, a fully functioning person is not individualistic, but prosocial, with the characteristics of a fully functioning person supporting a person's sense of being and belonging.

Positioning wellbeing as process that involves a dynamic assemblage of human and other-than-human actants and as a process whereby a person moves towards autonomy and belonging as a congruent person recognises the relational dynamics involved in being well (Atkinson, 2013; White, 2017). This position also recognises a person's wellbeing is an individual endeavour that occurs in-relation with the social, material, and social aspects of the place a person inhabits. As such, we are all responsible for our own and each other's wellbeing and to live a good life involves moving towards an equitable quality of life for all (Rogers, 1961; 1963). Nature-based interventions are an example, where changes to participants' wellbeing are a relational endeavour, which involves nature, activities, and social interactions (Conlon et al., 2018; Kogstad et al., 2014). As I have demonstrated the personal qualities involved in the relationships offered by facilitators and fellow participants are likely to mediate the therapeutic effectiveness of nature-based interventions. Where, if participants

encounter affective relationships then these have the potential to be therapeutic, supporting participants' movement towards fully functioning (Mearns and Cooper, 2018; Rogers, 1961). However, the potentiality of these relationships on influencing participants' long-term wellbeing also involves firstly, the readiness of a participant to change and their aims for engaging with a nature-based interventions (Mearns and Thorne, 2007). Secondly, the wider socio-environment a participant inhabits, which may support or thwart a person's movement towards congruence between their self-concept and organism (Kaley et al., 2019; Mearns and Thorne, 2007). As such, it is important to recognise the unique context of participants participation when exploring the influence of it on their long-term wellbeing. To underpin this exploration, I conclude by explaining the importance of engaging the concept of therapeutic landscapes with person-centred psychotherapy to provide a theoretical framework for understanding facilitated therapeutic landscape experiences.

3.5 Person-centred therapeutic encounters: Towards understanding the long-term influences of nature-based interventions

Nature-based interventions are facilitated encounters designed to promote participants' wellbeing, as well as being complex assemblages involving dynamic interactions between people, nature, and activities. Consequently, the theoretical framework needs to consider and be able to explain, firstly, how facilitators influence participants' engagements at nature-based interventions. Secondly, how participants shape these interactions through their choices, actions, and lived experiences. Thirdly, how these encounters can be transformative and co-create beneficial long-term changes to participants' quality of life. Through drawing on the concept of therapeutic landscapes and person-centred psychotherapy, I propose a theoretical framework that supports exploring and understanding the relational qualities of the human and the other-than-human interactions that occur at nature-based interventions. A person-centred approach to therapeutic landscape experiences also underpins explanation of the long-term effects, and variation in these, from participating at nature-based interventions.

The concept of therapeutic landscapes considers the social, material, symbolic, and spatial aspects of a place on people's wellbeing through proposing that people's therapeutic landscape experiences occur due to a relational encounter with a place. Through the concept of a relational self, researchers have considered the influence of people's relationship(s) with a place - as an assemblage of human and other-than human actants - and the folding of these relational affects into a person's sense of self, which can lead to changes in their sense of self and practices (Cacciatore et al., 2020; Gorman, 2017c; Kaley et al., 2019; Milligan et al., 2004). The relational self has also been proposed as accounting for the variations in people's therapeutic landscape experiences and as being a source for the different effects of people-place encounters (Conradson, 2005). Research engaging with a therapeutic landscape lens has also recognised particular qualities of affective relationships, including empathy, genuineness, and non-judgemental acceptance (Biglin, 2020; Parry and Glover, 2010; Warner et al., 2013).

I turned to person-centred psychotherapy to expand on the concept of a relational self through embracing Rogers' (1951) understanding of a person as an embodied organism, as the self is one part of a person, being a psychological concept of who we are. A person is also their organism, which has a tendency to actualise and is a source of understanding and valuing experience. This actualising tendency means people have the resource within them to grow and self-heal. However, this tendency requires a supportive environment, or it can be thwarted, estranging a person from their organismic valuing process. As a person's self-concept is influenced by other people's values and judgements, which can lead to people making decisions based on the values and judgements they have adopted to gain approval, rather than relying on their organismic valuing process to evaluate their experience of events and guide their judgments, leading to emotional distress. As such the affective personal qualities of non-judgemental acceptance, empathy, and genuineness (identified within the therapeutic landscapes literature) are recognised as facilitative as they do not place conditions of worth on a person's experience. These affective relationships support a person to reconnect to their organismic valuing process as a guide to nourishing experiences rather than perceiving the value of their experiences through other

people's ideas and attitudes. As such, a person develops trust in their feelings and thoughts to guide their decision-making, supporting the development of an internal locus of evaluation. This aids a person's wellbeing as their experience of their world more closely aligns with their actions within it. This fosters a person's self-concept that actualises in the same direction as their organism, promoting integration and reducing emotional distress, thus improving their long-term wellbeing.

Person-centred psychotherapy, far from being naïve and overly optimistic, provides a robust and empirically evidenced image of a person, which begins from a position of health and integration, and is growth-oriented. The theory of personal development that underpins person-centred psychotherapy explains how a person's tendency towards growth can be supported or disrupted by interpersonal and societal relationships. Subsequently, engaging with person-centred psychotherapy can provide insight into the role of facilitators and participants at nature-based interventions in co-creating therapeutic encounters, and the influence of these affective experiences on participants' long-term wellbeing. Person-centred psychotherapy also draws our attention to the person as an expert on their lived experiences and life. As such, understanding people's temporal and spatial contexts will aid understanding how people's therapeutic landscape experiences can aid their short-term wellbeing, and the factors involved in supporting or thwarting the transfer of the benefits gained from these experiences into their everyday and over their lifecourse. By engaging the concept of therapeutic landscapes with person-centred psychotherapy, more prominence is given to the agency of the people involved in the therapeutic landscape experiences, as well as providing a depth of understanding about how relationships facilitate or hinder a person's agency.

Finally, understanding the influence on participants' long-term wellbeing from participating at nature-based interventions involves approaching wellbeing as a relational process. A process involving a person's sense of being well that is co-created through the human and other-than-human relations a person is part of; and that is a continual process of becoming a congruent person. This process occurs through a person being-in-relation with their self and others. As such, it provides a concept of

wellbeing that recognises a person's long-term wellbeing involves their being and belonging. Approaching wellbeing as a relational process will firstly, support exploring and understanding the multiple human and other-than human actants involved in the psychosocial processes at nature-based interventions. Secondly, in considering the factors involved in participants' maintenance and enhancement of any benefits to their wellbeing from participation over their lifecourse. This requires situating participants within their lived experience and biography. Through contextualising participants' nature-based intervention participation, I can draw out the supportive and detrimental relational factors on participants' wellbeing at the time of their participation and over their lifecourse.

Chapter 4 Participants are the experts: A phenomenological approach for co-exploring lived experience

4.1 Introduction

The aim of my research is to explore how participants' long-term wellbeing was influenced by participating at a nature-based intervention when a young person (16-26). As I noted in my literature review, some recent studies suggest supportive psychosocial processes are involved in facilitating changes to participants' wellbeing, however the role of facilitators and participants has been neglected. This is alongside limited follow-up studies to understand how participants' wellbeing is maintained and enhanced beyond the nature-based intervention across the lifecourse. The shortage of research in these areas has implications for how nature-based interventions are understood to co-create beneficial impacts on participants' wellbeing, and how, for how long, and to whom, nature-based interventions are recommended to. As such, to respond to these research gaps and to address my aim, I focused on the situated experiences of the experts of nature-based interventions - the participants and the facilitators.

As my engagement with person-centred psychotherapy is a significant part of my theoretical framework it was important to engage with a methodology that would co-produce data grounded in participants' experiences, as it is from experience the theory emerges. As such, I chose interpretative phenomenology due to significant parallels with Rogers' development of person-centred psychotherapy, particularly Rogers' foregrounding of individuals' lived experience as the key to understanding people and therefore, to affective psychotherapeutic practice (Cooper, 2007b). Subsequently, to understand affective psychosocial spaces at nature-based interventions and the longevity of benefits to participants' wellbeing required methods that would support exploring with participants and facilitators how they perceived, experienced, and interpreted their encounters at nature-based interventions. As such, I engaged with a range of in-depth qualitative and creative research methods: semi-structured interviews, life mapping, photography, and fieldnotes. My fieldwork took place during

the COVID-19 pandemic and due to local and national restrictions in the UK, as well as the physical distancing guidance from the World Health Organisation (Department of Health and Social Care, 2020; World Health Organisation, 2020), I revised my methods from an in-person approach to a remote approach. The remote approach I utilised combined digital and other-than-digital forms of communication and representation, specifically online video conferencing, telephone, emails, post, photography, and hand drawn maps.

To explain my research design, I begin by outlining the development of my research questions and my choice of a qualitative approach, underpinned by phenomenology, for my co-exploration with participants and facilitators of their lived experiences. Next, I describe the participants who took part in my research and the process of accessing them. I follow by explaining my rationale for the qualitative, creative, and visual research methods I used, including utilising a remote approach. Next, I discuss how I processed and analysed the data produced. Then I explore my ethical considerations regarding the participants and myself as the researcher. I conclude, by recognising the significance of a research process that is grounded in the researcher's and participants' realities in co-producing data that is lively and vital and provides insights into complex and dynamic phenomena.

4.2 Where and who are the facilitators and participants?

As I highlighted in the literature review (see Chapter 2), there is a developing evidence-base regarding the affective characteristics of nature-based interventions, nature, activities, and social interaction, which have been attributed to co-creating short-term benefits to participants' mental wellbeing (Harrod and von Benzon, forthcoming). However, researchers have paid less attention to the roles of the facilitators and participants, who have the potential to mediate participants' experience through their interactions with each other, the activities, and nature. Meanwhile, Fernee et al.'s (2021) proposal of a psychosocial environment being involved in facilitating transformation in participants' wellbeing also requires turning our attention to the facilitators and participants to understand the formation of psychosocial environments

at nature-based interventions. Finally, the majority of research has focused on understanding the short-term impacts of participation at nature-based interventions on participants' wellbeing, rather than following up the longevity of beneficial changes.

Subsequently, there are gaps in our understanding regarding *who* the facilitators and participants are and *how* participants' encounters and wellbeing are shaped both during the intervention and over their lifecourse. As such, focusing on these two actants and situating their experiences of nature-based interventions within their biographies, will provide context regarding facilitators' and participants' backgrounds, intentions, and motivations; the personal qualities involved in affective interactions; and the underlying processes involved in influencing participants' wellbeing during participation and over their lifecourse. As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, turning our attention to the agency and context of the participants and the facilitators can provide in-depth understanding of how participants' sense of self and wellbeing is influenced by their participation, and beneficial changes maintained and enhanced over their lifecourse.

In responding to these research gaps, I developed a series of research questions:

1. How do participants' and facilitators' backgrounds, motivations, and intentions influence young people's experiences at nature-based interventions?
2. What personal and relational qualities are involved in co-creating affective psychosocial processes at nature-based interventions?
3. How do the above factors influence the longevity of beneficial effects on young people's mental wellbeing from participating at a nature-based intervention?

As I am interested in the participants' perspectives on their lived experiences - how they perceive and experience the world they inhabit, as well as 'who' emerges from these situated and social experiences - phenomenology provides a suitable foundation for this enquiry, as this perspective attends to the significance of the character and structure of people's lived experience (Cerbone, 2014). Through this research, I sought to develop an in-depth understanding of participants' and facilitators' lived experiences

of nature-based interventions and the meanings they ascribed to those experiences. Specifically, I was interested in the long-term beneficial influences and processes participants and facilitators identified at nature-based interventions. For participants, it was also important to understand how these benefits to their wellbeing unfolded over time, including the factors that supported or challenged the maintenance of affective practices and relationships in their everyday across their lifecourse. Phenomenological inquiry supports developing detailed and in-depth accounts of a particular phenomenon that are founded on the perspectives of those with lived experience of that phenomena, supporting rich insights into the nature of that phenomena (Frechette et al., 2020; Neubauer et al., 2019).

Research studies involving qualitative (Dunkley, 2009; Milligan et al., 2004), quantitative (Hitter et al., 2019; Stevenson et al., 2021), and mixed methods (Cacciatore et al., 2020; Puhakka, 2023) approaches have highlighted the short-term benefits of nature-based interventions on participants' wellbeing. However, qualitative methodologies appear particularly well suited to exploring the intricacies of people's experiences of nature-based interventions and the continuing impact of participation on their lives (e.g., Fernee et al., 2021; Kaley et al., 2019). This is because qualitative approaches recognise and value the complexity of people's lived experience; the relations, places, and assemblages involved (Cope, 2010; Herbert, 2010); and provide in-depth insight into people's processes regarding their practices and behaviours and the meanings attributed to their experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Winchester and Rofe, 2016). A range of conventional and novel qualitative methods are used by researchers to explore and illuminate the complexities of people's experiences, the places people inhabit, and the societal structures people are part of (Baxter and Fenton, 2016; Braun and Clarke, 2013; Winchester and Rofe, 2016). The use of qualitative methods can explore with participants the what, how, and why of their experiences and the impact of these on their wellbeing. For example, Duff's (2012) study exploring how community places support people's mental health recovery employed a mix of visual methods and interviews. The study involved 24 participants with a 'mental illness', aged between 24 and 47. To understand the various affective, material, and social aspects of supportive places participants were asked to map their

local community and highlight significant places, alongside a researcher. This was accompanied by the participants creating a photo-journal of these favourite places. Finally, participants were interviewed to understand the meanings associated with these supportive places.

I have explained the development of my research questions and the rationale for my chosen methodology to answer these questions. Over the following sections I explain further my research design. Firstly, I consider my reasons for undertaking a phenomenological approach.

4.3 Researching lived experience: A phenomenological approach

Rogers viewed people's direct experience as the highest authority in understanding and facilitating their process of becoming (Rogers, 1961). As Rogers proposed that an individual's response to the world is mediated by their perception and experience of it, as this is their reality (Rogers, 1951; 1959). As such, to understand someone's actions and choices requires understanding their situated and relational subjective experience. This focus on the significance of people's lived experience as the key to understanding people's reality is also recognised in phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophy initiated by Edmund Husserl, which has been developed as a philosophical movement by a number of philosophers, including Martin Heidegger³, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre (Cerbone, 2014; Moran, 2000). Husserl proposed that people's lived experiences are the starting point for the development of knowledge and insights into understanding people's being, including understanding their actions, beliefs, meaning making, and reality (Cerbone, 2014; Cooper, 2007b). Husserl suggested to attend to ours and other people's experiences requires bracketing off our personal assumptions and biases; to privilege describing experiences over the examination of them; and to treat all experiences equally (Cooper, 2007b; Moran, 2000). The essence

³ I am aware of Heidegger's association with the Nazi party and Nazi ideology, which sits uncomfortable with me. As does, the separating of a person's unpleasant and inappropriate actions and characteristics from their ideas. However, Hermeneutic phenomenology does align with the position I have developed regarding understanding lived experience. As such, I engaged with this philosophical concept for my research, whilst acknowledging my personal discomfort in doing so.

(character and structure) of an experience would then be discovered, which would uncover insightful perspectives and new meanings due to the phenomena being isolated and not influenced by personal and analytical assumptions (Cerbone, 2014; Frechette et al., 2020).

However, Heidegger proposed it is not possible for a person to remove themselves from their context and influences. As such, people experience phenomenon in relation to their being-in-the-world (including being-with-others) (Moran, 2000; Neubauer et al., 2019). Consequently, to understand people's experiences requires more than description, rather an interpretive approach to understanding phenomenon. This requires the account of a person's lived experience to include an interpretation of the significance of the experience to the person (Frechette et al., 2020). This being-in-the-world includes a social dimension, so that whilst phenomenology is interested in an individual's experiences, by necessity it includes a person's social relations and context (Frechette et al., 2020; Neubauer et al., 2019).

I engaged with interpretative phenomenology as it underpinned a co-exploration with the participant of their situated lived experience. As interpretative phenomenology guides exploring people's specific lived experiences in relation to their situated biography and social context. This occurs through moving between part of a person's story and the whole of their narrative, as we can only fully understand that part of their story within the context of their whole world (Frechette et al., 2020; Neubauer et al., 2019). This supported situating participants' and facilitators' experiences of nature-based interventions within their biography, which supported understating the processes involved in effective nature-based interventions. Secondly, considering how a person contextualises their experiences of nature-based interventions, was crucial for understanding the personal significance of these events on their life and long-term wellbeing.

Interpretative phenomenology aligns with my own therapeutic experiences and belief in the significance and value of people's lived experience in understanding their process of becoming. In my experience as a person-centred psychotherapist, co-

creating moments of relational depth with clients has often co-created significant turning points for the client as their experience, as perceived and interpreted by them, becomes known and is validated by another (Mearns and Cooper, 2018). However, this co-creation of relational depth requires reflective practice, to ensure that I am open to the client's experience and do not project my own experiences into the client's world. Instead, I aim to hold lightly my experiences, engaging with them as 'touchstones' to facilitate connection and the development of understanding through bridging together the client's and my knowledges. Touchstones are extremely important and meaningful experiences, which provide a person with a richer understanding of an aspect of existence (Knox and Cooper, 2015). For example, my nature connectedness was a touchstone in the interviews with facilitators and participants to support firstly, engaging deeply with facilitators' and participants' experiences of connecting with nature, and secondly, exploring the role of nature as a safe place and for supporting mental wellbeing, especially in light of distressing experiences. However, as with my therapeutic practice, I held my position regarding the potential benefits of nature connectedness lightly, as it is the facilitators' and participants' lived experience, I was interested in. Holding it lightly helped me to connect and ground myself in the facilitators' and participants' world, but the data produced was guided by them and their experiences, values, and views.

The shame itself is trapping, I have kept it hidden underneath masks and as such I have kept myself hidden underneath those masks and I am so very tired of living like that. As well as living as if I am still in an environment that is threatening to me – perhaps why I find nature so good to be with, as it is not threatening to me, though bog scares me, but I can migrate against that risk if I take care and learn. I don't think bog would have left such a mark on me if I wasn't already very low in my confidence due to being childless and full of shame. Nature is a safe place and the times I am content is when I am moving outside, yes, our local area is becoming very familiar to me, but I do still enjoy being out in it, a lot more than being inside, where I can find myself hiding away. (Fieldnote, 26 January 2021)

Reflecting on my nature-connectedness in my fieldnotes (see section 4.5.4) supported me to develop a deeper understanding of my experience, as well as supported me to turn my attention to the role of nature connectedness at nature-based interventions and beyond in supporting participants' long-term wellbeing practices. My justification for the use of fieldnotes, interviews, and creative and visual methods to explore participants lived experience is expanded on in section 4.5. Next, I consider the research participants and the process of involving their voices.

4.4 Research Participants: Involving the experts

To involve former or long-term participants and facilitators of nature-based interventions I first had to develop my own database of nature-based interventions based in the UK, as there is no definitive directory of nature-based interventions available. The database I developed included national and community organisations that identified as providing a nature-based intervention. My database consists of 497 nature-based interventions across the UK. I utilised a variety of sources to populate the database including Mind's (2013) Ecominds Directory of projects, and the local area searches available on the Social Farms and Gardens (Social Farms & Gardens, 2020), Groundwork (Groundwork, 2020) and TCV (TCV, 2020) websites. I then added to the database through detailed search engine requests and Twitter (now X) searches.

The recruitment process involved emailing the organisations (who were the gatekeepers) inviting them to participate in the study. For interested organisations I then provided further information about the project and advertising materials to support them sharing details about my research through their mailing lists with their facilitators and participants. Interested participants were asked to contact me via my university email or phone number, and I answered any questions and provided them with the project information sheet explaining the research. Once, participants decided to take part I provided them with an electronic consent form to complete and sign. On receipt of a participant's signed consent, I arranged the interview(s) and where applicable posted the participant a pack, continuing the guidance and materials for the life mapping and photography activity.

A purposeful approach to sampling was undertaken as I was interested in participants with in-depth experiences of firstly, nature-based interventions, and secondly, living with and integrating these experiences into their process of becoming a person (Frechette et al., 2020; Worth and Hardill, 2015). My aim was to recruit 5-10 facilitators and 15-20 participants from a range of nature-based interventions to develop a breadth and depth of experiences to support understanding the psychosocial processes involved and the longevity of wellbeing from participating at a nature-based intervention. As I was analysing the data alongside the data production, I factored in stopping when I had achieved data saturation. Saturation is the concept where data is produced until no new information emerges from the data (O'Reilly and Parker, 2012), for example, no new codes or themes (Braun and Clarke, 2019), at which point saturation has been reached and data production can stop.

Through the above recruitment process I recruited 26 study participants, composed of 11 facilitators (see table 4.1) and 15 former or long-term participants (see table 4.2) of nature-based interventions across England and Scotland. For clarity, throughout the thesis I use 'participants' to refer to the people who participated at a nature-based intervention and 'facilitators', when referring to the facilitators of a nature-based intervention.

Facilitators who were currently facilitating a nature-based intervention were invited to take part. The original purpose for including facilitators in this study was to provide context regarding the aims of nature-based interventions and how they are delivered, as well as the benefits and challenges for the attending participants. However, after the first few interviews it became clear to me that the facilitators were a rich source of knowledge and experiences regarding the potential psychosocial processes involved at nature-based interventions as an influence on participants' long-term wellbeing. As with adapting my fieldwork from an in-person to a remote approach, this highlights the importance of taking a reflexive and dynamic approach to research design. Both decisions were informed by an ethics of care (see section 4.7, which includes a discussion of my ethical process regarding remote methods). Regarding these

interviews I believed that potentially more benefit could be achieved for participants and nature-based interventions by shifting my perspective on the interviews away from providing context to providing unique insights into the processes at nature-based interventions. As such, the interviews with facilitators became an integral aspect of my dataset.

The facilitators involved represent firstly, a range of nature-based organisations, secondly, a range of local small scale and national scale organisations, and thirdly, a range of backgrounds, including social work, farming, psychology, gardening as a hobby, and environmental conservation.

Name	Type of Nature-based intervention	Local or National Organisation
Stuart	Community Garden	Local
Mhairi	Environmental Conservation with focused wellbeing activities	National
Gary	Ecotherapy informed activities	Local
Jason	Environmental Conservation with focused wellbeing activities	National
Jane	Social & Therapeutic Horticulture	Local
Carol	Food Growing	Local
Clive	Environmental Conservation	National
Anne	Gardening and Group Walks	National
Sue	Social & Therapeutic Horticulture	Local
Alasdair	Community Garden	Local
Elaine	Environmental Conservation and Gardening Activities	National

Table 4.1 Study participants (facilitators)

Former or long-term participants were invited to take part on the basis that they had participated at a nature-based intervention between the ages of 16-29 and participated at least five years previously. Current follow-up studies have occurred at

three (Gittins et al., 2023), six (Willert et al., 2014), 12 (Stigsdotter et al., 2018), and 18 months (Roberts et al., 2017), and are typically 12 months or less (see Chapter 2). I selected a five-year gap as I was interested in understanding the longevity of wellbeing benefits and if they influenced the development of firstly, long-term wellbeing practices, secondly, meaningful, and purposeful life choices, for example, study, work, hobbies, and thirdly, constructive ways to handle disruptions during the lifecourse. I considered five years a suitable timeframe for participants to have potentially made a range of life choices and encountered difficulties since their participation, in order to explore the influence of their participation on their life. In discussion with two participants, I reduced this gap to three years to include a broader range of experiences, both pre, during, and post the nature-based intervention.

Previous long-term studies focused on young people's participation at nature-based interventions have focused on adolescents (12-18) and involved three (Bowen et al., 2016) and 12 (Fernee et al., 2021; Harper et al., 2007; Russell, 2003) month follow-ups. The 18-month follow-up focused on young adults, aged 18-32 (Roberts et al., 2017), and this age range overlaps with the concept of emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is proposed as a distinct time, between 18-29, in people's lives, which is considered as an unsettling time (Arnett, 2004; 2015). This is due to people experiencing a sense of being in-between adolescence and adulthood as they experience a range of transitions, which can offer possibilities for transformation and growth, as well as challenges. During this period people are deemed to be focused on exploring their identity, values, sense of purpose, and skills for dealing with everyday living. These themes align with the concept of youth (16-25), which is recognised as being a period involving several transitional events which can influence young people's sense of self and wellbeing (Skelton, 2002; Valentine, 2003; Worth, 2009). It was the idea that 16-29 can be considered as a time of 'finding ourselves' that I was drawn to and why I selected that age range.

In addition, negotiating these transitions can be challenging and negatively influence young people's wellbeing (Boisvert et al., 2022). There is a growing concern for young people's mental wellbeing and the consequences of not attending to 'mental health

difficulties' at the time leading to impairing a person's wellbeing and flourishing across their lifecourse (Jackson et al., 2023; World Health Organization, 2021; Young Minds, 2021). As such, I was interested in exploring *if* and *why* participating at nature-based interventions influenced young people's wellbeing at the time, but more importantly the longevity of these influences on their sense of self and the maintenance and enhancement of their wellbeing. A key concern of mine within psychotherapy is what is known as 'the revolving door', whereby people who develop a 'mental health issue' become trapped revolving in and out of mental health services due to their symptoms of distress being attend to, rather than the whole of the person being met. As such, as nature-based interventions attend to the whole person and work with participants' abilities rather than focus on a participant's specific condition, I wanted to understand if this approach was beneficial to young people's sense of self and long-term wellbeing.

The former and long-term participants involved represent a range of nature-based interventions, offered through local small scale and national scale organisations. The 15 participants also had a range of reasons for attending, for example, low mood, isolated, to have fun, live a full life, make friends, and gain relevant work experience; as well as intentions from their participation, regarding their sense of being and belonging, including, improving their mental wellbeing, their career options, and their social wellbeing. The participants represented a range of ages during their participation, 16-26, and time elapsed since their participation, three to 39 years. For participants who attended 20+ years ago, their involvement involved a detailed conversation to ascertain that they had participated in an intervention underpinned by the aim of improving participants wellbeing.

Name	Type of Nature-based intervention	Age at Participation	Age at interview	Gender	Ethnicity
Jilly	Green Exercise (Walking)	25	60	Female	White
Daisy May	Environmental Conservation	21	25	Female	White British
Gary	Adventure Activities	19	44	Male	White British
Emma	Care Farm Activities (City Farm)	16	30	Female	White British
Michael	Adventure Activities and Environmental Conservation	24	56	Male	White Irish
Alex	Environmental Conservation	24	32	Female	White European
Tomasz	Environmental Conservation and Gardening Activities	16	23	Male	White British
Jaanki	Environmental Conservation	16	31	Female	British East-African Asian
Mike	Environmental Conservation	24	37	Male	White British
ES	Community Garden	16	22	Female	White British
Daniel	Forest-based Ecotherapy	23	26	Male	White British
Catherine	Wilderness Therapy	16	32	Female	White Mix
Alex B	Environmental Conservation	17	26	Not provided	Not provided
Gill	Green and Blue exercise (Hiking and Sailing)	26	65	Female	British
Colleen	Community Garden	21	30	Female	White British

Table 4.2 Study participants (former and long-term participants of nature-based interventions)

My research involves a mix of study participants' voices, however I recognise that there are voices missing from this research. As noted, the fieldwork occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have reduced the opportunity for people to hear about the project and become involved. For example, the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (GOV.UK, 2020) resulted in several named contacts for organisations being furloughed, which meant I was unable to invite former or long-term participants or the facilitators from those organisations. The gap of five years may have also acted as a barrier, as some organisations I contacted did not hold onto former participants' contact details that long or relied on former participants having supplied an email address to remain on a mailing list for newsletters. Former participants' email addresses may have also changed since they finished participating. As I discuss in the following section, whilst I aimed to ensure the methods I used were as inclusive as possible, they still required participants to have some degree of literacy and technological literacy, especially due to using a remote approach. I did have discussions with several potential participants whose literacy levels and/or technological literacy levels were low, but only two of those participants became involved, both requiring the support of a family member or a friend to engage. Consequently, my chosen methods (see section 4.5) and having to switch to a remote approach (see section 4.5.5) may have acted as a barrier in limiting the range of voices involved. Finally, the participants' ethnic diversity is not representative of the ethnic diversity within the UK, but from anecdotal evidence from the study participants, may be representative of the ethnic diversity of groups at nature-based interventions. This also aligns with claims that members of the Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic population are one of the groups least likely to visit the countryside, with the children half as likely to visit the countryside as White children (Glover, 2019; Smith and Pitt, 2022; The Countryside Charity, 2021).

4.5 Data production: Tellin' Stories

Words are a commonly used for telling our stories, and interviews are a core method of qualitative research with the semi-structured interview being the dominant interview approach (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Brinkmann, 2013). However, there are other

dimensions through which people can express their experiences, including sensory and visual aspects, which are not always easy to reduce into words (Bagnoli, 2009). As such, by asking participants to visually represent their experiences they may access and share other aspects of their experiences. When creative and visual methods are combined with interviews, the context, understandings, and meanings of the images can be elicited, which produces a nuanced understanding of the representations within the images (Mannay, 2016). Participants' visual and creative representations can also unsettle an interview guide, providing topics that may not have been considered and opportunities to learn from participants and their lived experiences (Mannay, 2016). Overall, to delve deeply into a participants' lived experiences requires methods which facilitate their self-exploration through the multiple dimensions in which life is lived.

I choose to use semi-structured interviews, which for the participants was supported by life mapping and photography activities. For the facilitators, data production involved one stage, and for the former or long-term participants it involved two stages (see table 4.3). For the 11 facilitators, their involvement involved an in-depth semi-structured interview (average 100 minutes). For the 15 participants, stage one involved the participants creating a life map, which informed the first in-depth semi-structured interview (average 2 hours). Stage two, required the participants to take photographs of places they engage with for the purpose of their wellbeing, followed by a second in-depth semi-structured interview (average 98 minutes). The interviews were either recorded in Teams or via an audio recorder for the phone interviews. The fieldwork took place remotely between October 2020 and June 2021.

Stage	Name of activity	Number of participants	Proposed time commitment	Location
Facilitators				
1	Semi-structured interview	11	60-90 minutes	Remote via Microsoft Teams or Phone call (Jabber)
Participants				
1a	Life map	15	15-45 minutes	Participant's home
1b	Semi-structured interview	15	1-2 hours	Remote via Microsoft Teams or Phone call (Jabber)
2a	Photo activity	15	15-45 minutes	Participant's local area
2b	Semi-structured interview	15	60-90 minutes	Remote via Microsoft Teams or Phone call (Jabber)

Table 4.3 Fieldwork schedule

4.5.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are based on the topics and questions the researcher wants to cover, as well as providing flexibility in the flow and order of the interview in response to the participant's replies. They also allow individual participants to share areas of interest to them (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Kvale, 2007). Through interviews, researchers can explore, at depth, with participants their lived experiences, as well as their motives, values, practices and views, gaining rich and detailed insights from multiple perspectives (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Rubin and Rubin (2012) propose a 'responsive interviewing' method, where the researcher seeks to build a relationship with the participant based on openness and trust, where the researcher shows respect for the participant's experience and insights and adapts the interview to the participant. As such, the researcher and the participant through their

interactions co-construct the experiences the participant shares. My experience as a person-centred psychotherapist also informs my choice of interviews as a substantial aspect of my qualitative methods. As a person-centred psychotherapist I endeavour to meet clients authentically, to be non-judgemental, and with empathy enter their world, working with them on their process of change (Rogers, 1961). As such I have significant experience at developing relationships and co-creating safe and affective spaces. I work sensitively with people's experiences and processes, empowering them to take charge of the conversation and adapting to their needs. I applied the same approach to my interviews, and I found the participants appreciated my warm interest in their experiences and acceptance of them.

Yeah, great I really like that when you ask me a question and I answer, you then ask me more about it. So, it makes me think about it more and challenge myself ... I find you very understanding, such as carrying sand in my pockets. A lot of people think that's strange. (Daisy May, Participant)

I've really enjoyed both interviews. You're lovely to talk to, and yes, it's kind of nice to share these things. Because you've got an actual interest for your project and you've asked me detailed questions about not just something that I enjoy, but something that's been very important in my life, and has helped me a lot, and to be able to convey in such detail what impact it's had, it's been quite enjoyable. (Alex, Participant)

Even through practising an approach which adapts the interview to the participant, there will still be a power imbalance between the researcher, who is asking the questions and the participant who is answering them. Kvale (2007) suggests this power asymmetry arises due to the researcher defining the interview topics for the purpose of their research, as well as controlling the interpretation of the participants' statements and how this is reported. During the interviews I did refer to interview guides (see Appendix A), but I sought to reduce this power imbalance through using a person-centred approach, which respected the participant's experiences, knowledge, and perspective and by encouraging participants to view the interview process as a

“joint process of discovery” (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, p. 7). I involved participants through allowing them to go off on their own train(s) of thought, which I encouraged through asking follow-up questions. I reasoned there were sharing those experiences in response to my questions because they held meaning and value to them. I also referred back to my interview guide, especially when participants digressed too far from the aims of the research to gently nudge participants back on track. The exchange below with Elaine, a facilitator, captures my sense that the interviews were a ‘joint process of discovery’.

Elaine: I've really enjoyed it because, again, I don't have that many opportunities to actually think about what it is I do, how I do it, why I do it, what I want from it, what I get from it. I know those things intrinsically, but to actually speak it out in this quite precise way. I might be all over the place, but you bring me back to the questions and so that you get the answers that you want. That's been really helpful for me.

Andy: Oh, thank you and yeah, I've really enjoyed it as well. Yeah, I've got my questions, but I do just like it when yourself, others have just gone off in their directions, 'cause it's also for me what's interesting, what's important to you, (E: right yes) 'cause, I've ideas of how I'm shaping this project, but the bits I've liked the most is when people have surprised me and I think, and then start to build it around something like that. So, it's good to not just go down my own path.

Through carefully attending to and valuing the participants' lived experiences I maintained focus on their backgrounds, motivations, the factors they perceived helpful at nature-based interventions, and the factors involved in maintaining and enhancing long-term wellbeing. This produced a rich dataset grounded in the participants' lived experiences. This dataset was co-produced and will have been influenced by my positionality regarding nature connection (see section 4.3) and mental wellbeing. For example, several participants discussed having a psychiatric diagnosis and focused discussion on the symptoms, and for some, the sense that these symptoms were fixed

and unchangeable. Taking my position of symptoms as being an expression of distress, I gently enquired about the wider circumstances to try and develop a deeper understanding of their experiences. Both the experiences which were connected to the development of these symptoms and those which helped alleviate them. During this, I used the participants' language and respected their way of understanding and framing their emotional distress. Through attending to the participants' experiences, languages, and understanding with care, my positionality supported me to deepen our conversation. Specifically, regarding how the participants' encounters at nature-based interventions influenced their symptoms, as well as how their perspective on their mental health influenced applying the benefits of their participation across their lifecourse.

Finally, a surprising benefit of my attentive approach was that for several of the participants this supported their sense of ownership of the stories they shared with me. This in-turn supported realisations regarding their lives, including recognition of achievements; the effects of lockdown on them; becoming more open and connecting to people; and enriched understandings of their nature engagements and wellbeing practices.

Really interesting. ... I think I've got as much out of it, 'cause it's made me think a lot more about going out into the woods and the countryside and wellbeing ... It's made me realise how much I have done in the past talking about it, you know, because sometimes I feel miserable because life is really bad at the moment, and it made me realise 'oh look at all these fantastic things I've done in the past'. (Michael, Participant)

For the participants of the nature-based interventions their first interview was underpinned by the life map and the second interview was informed by their photographs. Both activities helped participants to direct the flow of the interviews and the unfolding of their experiences, enriching the interviews.

4.5.2 Life Mapping

I choose life mapping based on my experience of using timelines in counselling to facilitate clients' exploration of their history, lived experiences, and identity (Curry, 2009; Flentroy et al., 2015). I found this activity enabled clients to contextualise significant events and link them with the ongoing affects, which were underpinning their emotional distress. Life mapping has also been recognised by geographers as a valuable creative method for participants to express and explore their lifecourse in-depth and in understanding the influence of a range of life experiences through situating these experiences within participants' biographies (Hall, 2019; Worth, 2011). Life mapping can underpin lifecourse research through providing context regarding how participants perceive events in their life influencing their later choices and actions, as well as the interplay between the personal and social contexts involved in a person's process of becoming (Worth and Hardill, 2015). Worth (2011) proposes life maps are a form of participatory diagram, where participants decide which aspects of their experiences they share and how these are represented, thus producing different knowledge and accounts. Life mapping is associated with the use of timelines, which is a method which asks participants to indicate important biographical events and changes that have occurred during their life (Bagnoli, 2009). The use of timeline suggests a linear representation of time, and often a timeline can begin with the drawing of a line across the page (Adriansen, 2012), however participants may not experience time as linear or their lives as moving in a forward trajectory (Bagnoli, 2009). As such, I used the term life mapping, which, while having its own connotations, for example, maps are used to show a journey, was to encourage participants to indicate and link the important events and influences of their lives in a manner that is representative of how they view their life trajectory. Each participant created a unique life map, all of which involved a connection between events, though not always represented as a linear flow. Participants represented their lifecourse through graphs, tables, and flow diagrams involving text and occasionally drawings (see figures 4.1-4.4). Participants referred to engaging with the guidance and examples (Appendix B), but also incorporating their own approach.

I looked at the examples and it I suppose there are similarities to both of them, but I felt like mine was quite comprehensive in that I put quite a lot in there of stages of life ... I mean I was thinking initially that my map would be quite illustrative, and I thought I might put some colour and drawings on it and stuff like that and it just never came. I just did it quite naturally and it just ended up being what it was. (Gary, Participant).

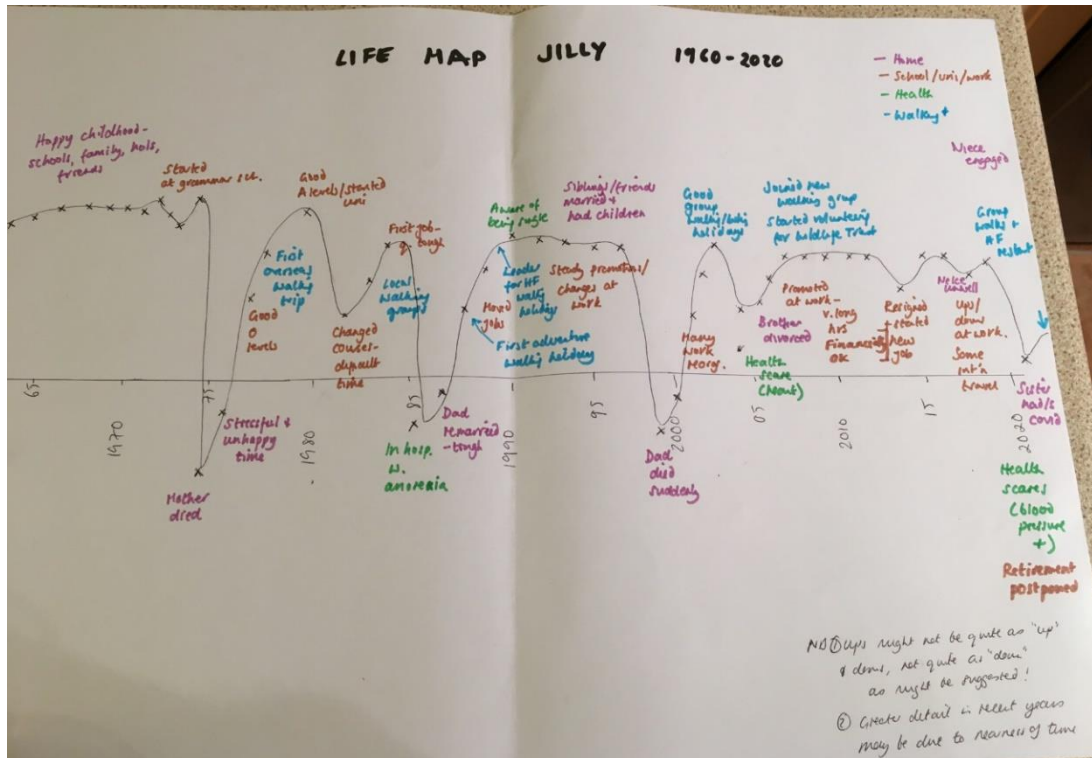


Figure 4.1 Jilly's life map

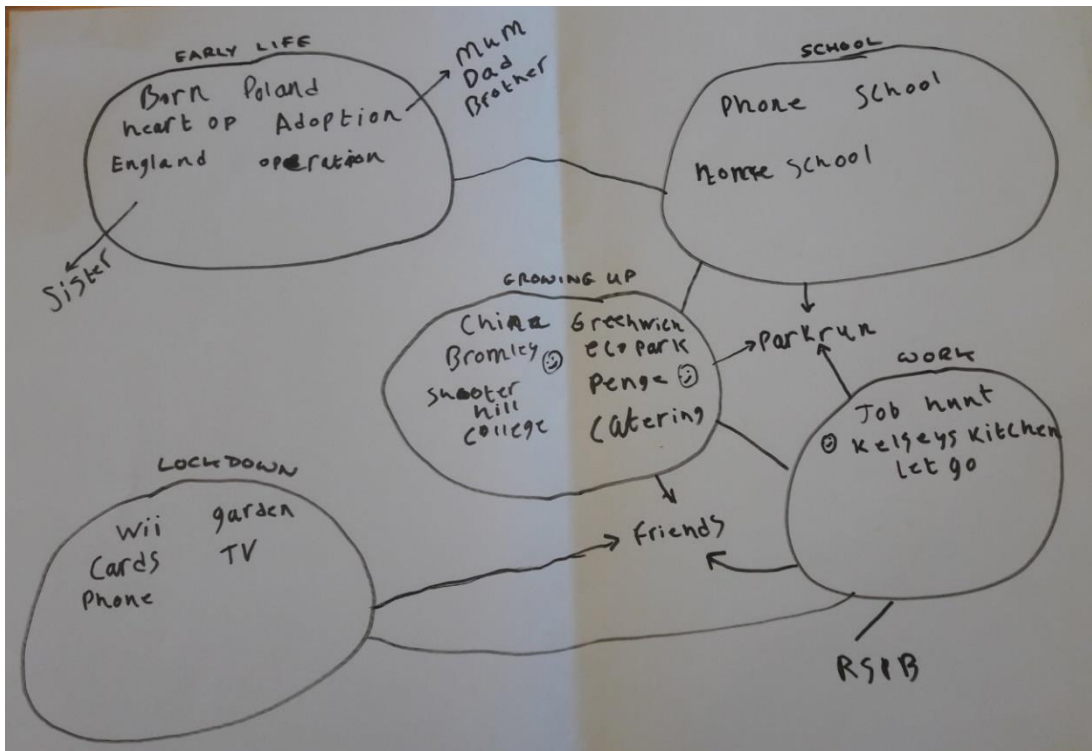


Figure 4.2 Tomasz 's life map

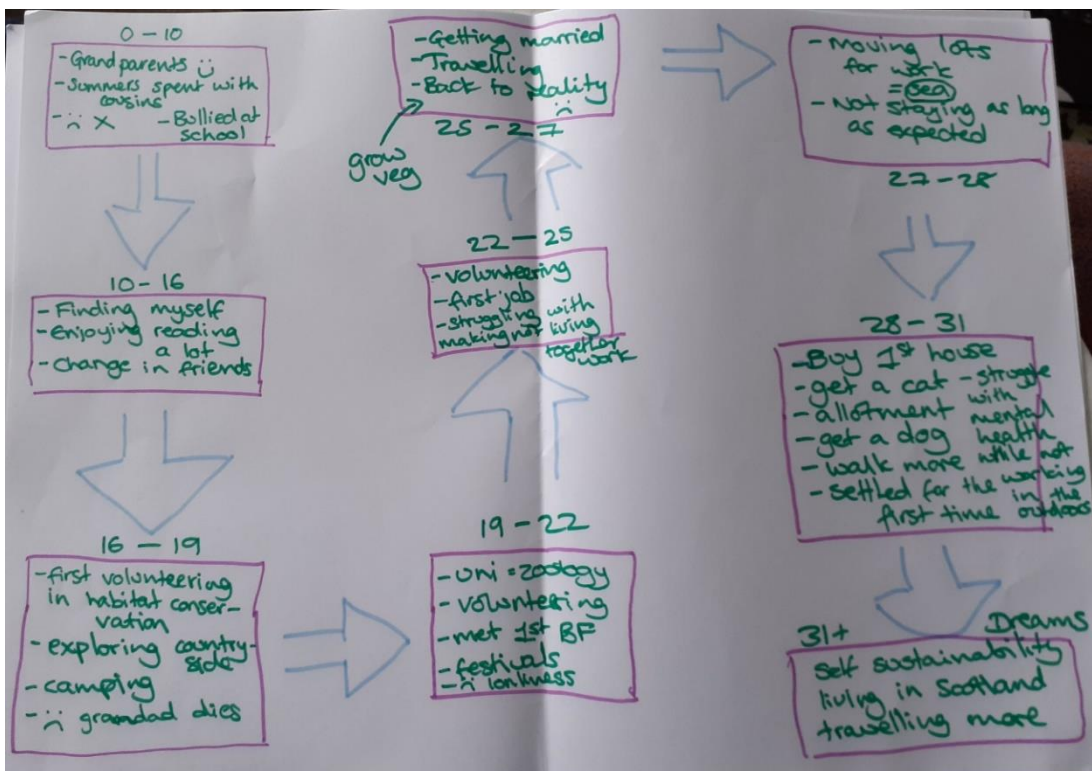


Figure 4.3 Jaanki's life map

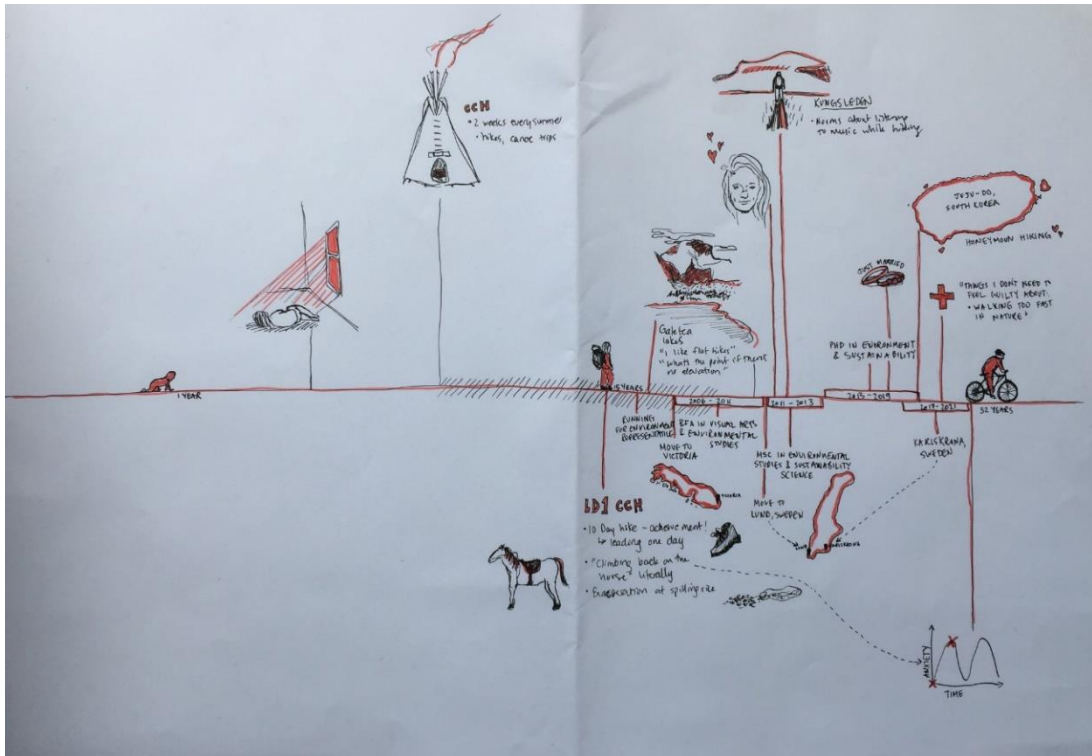


Figure 4.4 Catherine's life map

For the life maps I asked the participants to reflect on their experience of the nature-based intervention they attended and how it related to their wellbeing. The aim of the life map was to help participants prepare for the in-depth interview by supporting them to reflect on and organise their memories and experiences, providing a structure for their narrative through generating links between events (Adriansen, 2012; Bremner, 2020; Hall, 2019; Nelson, 2010; Pell et al., 2020; Worth, 2011). As such, life mapping normalises asking participants to reflect on, explore, and during the interview discuss their memories and past experiences. Memories, including their spatial and affective context, inform people of who they are, were, and want to be, shaping a sense of self (Barnier and Hoskins, 2018; Jones and Garde-Hansen, 2012). It is the participant's perception of their sense of self I am interested in exploring with the participant, alongside the narrative provided when discussing the influence of their encounters with nature-based interventions on their identity and life. However, this process of creating a narrative involves acts of forgetting in the recounting of memories, which may revise the memory of an experience offered (Hoelscher and Alderman, 2004; Jones and Garde-Hansen, 2012). As such, there may be gaps in the narratives participants share, which may affect the validity of the data. However, Hurtubise and

Joslin (2023) propose that any bias in recall suggestions those aspects are of particular importance to a person, and attention needs to be paid to how the narrative has been constructed.

Participants reported appreciating the opportunity to reflect on their life and to consider the various actants and relationships involved in their experiences and process of becoming. Through the process of participants visualising what is familiar to them, new perspectives and understandings were developed about their everyday practices (Mannay, 2016).

I think what really struck me was the interconnectedness of it all and I think I became aware especially later on. I think it was around twenty-six when I became more involved with the youth service, and I met more people and the more things I did, it was like a natural networking. It just seemed to evolve and like the universe was responding to my need to be with people and to be outdoors and it just kept happening and it was just wonderful really and that has been maintained over the years. (Gill, Participant)

I found asking participants to begin by visually representing their story helped them to engage with the interview process, building rapport with myself, and providing a means for participants to bring into the interview aspects that are important to them (Groenewald and Bhana, 2015; Kolar et al., 2017; Pell et al., 2020). As visual representations can facilitate participants' exploration as they move between events, adding depth to their account, through both the process of completing the timeline and then discussing it in the accompanying interview (Groenewald and Bhana, 2015).

The interview followed the life map, and it was pleasing how through discussing the life map and being able to refer to it we covered the questions, and the participant was able to share their experiences as they choose to. (Fieldnote, 29 October 2020)

The participant was engaged and reflective, using the life map as a series of jumping off points to talk further about the snapshots they have included as well as speak about aspects they hadn't noted on it. (Fieldnote, 19 November 2020)

The interview flowed well and was guided by the participant's life map, where they had focused on outdoor activities and events that affected their wellbeing. (Fieldnote, 31 March 2021)

The visual representation of a participant's narrative is an alternative way for participants to share their experiences, especially when discussing sensitive topics, for participants can choose which events to share and focus on the events significant to them (Bagnoli, 2009; Guenette and Marshall, 2009; Kolar et al., 2017; Worth, 2011). I found that participants being able to choose how they shared their experiences was empowering for them and provided a more holistic representation of the participants' experiences. For example, several participants chose to reference a difficult experience either explicitly or mark it on their life map using a symbol.

Only that I was trying to be honest and open to all the ups and downs and because I felt it's private and I know you're not going to judge me because of it and it's not a situation where I might be judged because of it. But I also felt it was an important part of this really. I suppose also it's a long time ago now, so doesn't quite feel as painful, but it does still feel painful because I don't like talking about it. (Jilly, Participant)

So, they are the kind of memories I have other than like the rubbish bits. (Andy: Yeah, I've noticed you got a cross and a sad face) Yeah, which I just didn't wanna write down more than anything else. Yeah, my parents didn't have the happiest of marriages. (Jaanki, Participant)

I found that having these indications of significant events helped facilitate me to gently ask participants about the impacts of the event in relation to their wellbeing, without

the need for the participant to provide more detail on the event itself (Kolar et al., 2017). However, some participants did choose to trust me with further details about the event itself.

I felt the participant's trust in me built during the interview, as indicated by them sharing more details about an experience, they previously referred to as traumatic incident. (Fieldnote, 3 November 2020)

I am being trusted by the participants with their experiences, some of which were very clearly difficult ones for them. (Fieldnote, 12 April 2021)

Through utilising life maps, the power imbalance was altered through providing participants the opportunity to direct the interview (Pell et al., 2020). This was important as I am interested in the factors participants perceived were important at nature-based interventions in co-creating affective experiences and on influencing their long-term wellbeing. To further explore with participants the relationships between their experiences at nature-based interventions and their wellbeing practices I offered them a photography activity.

4.5.3 Photography

Participatory photography activities involve participants in the research as active and creative agents of data production, where participants use cameras to record their experiences from their perspective (Mannay, 2016). Typically, the participant and researcher explore the photographs together in an interview to gain understanding of the context and what is represented in the image. Participatory photography is an accessible method, for example, Aldridge (2006) in her study investigating the benefits of social and therapeutic horticulture projects, utilised participatory photography to include the voices of people with learning disabilities. The approach allowed the participants with learning disabilities to represent their lived experience, providing a window through which to view their perspective. Visually representing their experiences meant their voices were included in the study when they were not able to

share their experiences through talking in interviews. Meanwhile, in Johnsen et al.'s (2008) study involving homeless people, the use of a participatory photography approach provided access and insights into new and known spaces of homelessness, specifically it offered an opportunity for homeless people to voice their experiences. This was not only through the photographs, which were often of poor quality, but in the accompanying interviews, from which understandings of the meaning of spaces and their use were gained.

The aim of the photography activity was to understand from the participant's perspective how they engage with everyday places for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing their wellbeing. I choose photography as through this medium the everyday can become unfamiliar, providing new perspectives on a sense of place, aiding participants' reflections on their surroundings and practices (Prins, 2012). I asked the participants to reflect on a place that is significant and meaningful to them and supports their wellbeing (Appendix C). However, the majority of participants chose to take photographs of different places, and some chose to use older photographs, which suggested they felt empowered to engage with the activity from their perspective and that multiple places have significance for them. Having a wider range of places to discuss also enriched the quality of the dataset.

It was interesting. I think one thing that I found tricky is in your instructions you said something about a place that supports your wellbeing and it felt really hard for me to be like 'oh a place'. For me place felt big ... my pictures are all different places because I'm often in motion in places ... my place is the islands around my home and it's how I move through them. (Catherine, Participant)

It was kind of strange 'cause I didn't necessarily get to everywhere I wanted to go and take pictures of. So, two of the pictures came from my phone but they're just places that I generally like love. So, that was nice and then all the other places I realised are really super local because that's how Covid has made us in this last year, and it's really shaped the places I actually go to and I realised how important like some places are, like the picture with the bluebells. I didn't realise

how important that was to me until I was thinking about this. So, it was very eye opening. (Jaanki, Participant)

As Jaanki discusses one aspect that come from the photography activity was the development of new understandings of place and community (Prins, 2012). Through discussing with the participants their photographs I also gained insights into how they engage with places, the meaning they ascribed to the places, and the effects of this engagement on their wellbeing (Johnsen et al., 2008; Pink, 2011; Trell and Van Hoven, 2010).

I enjoyed it because it's a lovely place ... it just gave me a chance to maybe see it in a slightly different light. So, I did it on two or three occasions because I wanted to capture different elements of it that meant something to me about being over there. (Jilly, Participant)

[I]t's a nice activity ... I guess it made me think about what are my favourite places and where do I go for nature solace. But it's only because of lockdown that you don't have as much freedom. So, that makes you think as with everything during lockdown the things we take for granted and makes you think about freedom and how nice it will be when we will have access to these things. (Alex, Participant)

Through the photographs the participants shared with me what it was like to look at their chosen place(s) through their eyes, bringing into focus the specific aspects of places that support or are detrimental to their wellbeing. This included other sensory aspects, including sounds, smells, and touch. These aspects were drawn out through a mutual exploration in the interviews regarding what the photo captured and represented. This in-turn sometimes lead to exploring what had been left out by choosing that particular shot and how that influenced the participant's sense of place (Johnsen et al., 2008).

I found it an enjoyable experience hearing stories about the photos and the sense that the story expanded the boundaries of the photo, enlivening them with what wasn't captured in that snapshot. This included animal and bird life, their movement and sound, the feelings and emotional connection to the place(s) and layers of memories that a place may represent or symbolise. (Fieldnote, 17 November 2020)

Was that the last one? (Andy: That's the last one) Well I suppose that's interesting in itself because that means I put the camera away at that point and I walked towards that tree where my treehouse was, but there must be at least a hundred meters between there and there. I'm thinking that maybe it was almost a bit of that urban street feel for me, because the houses are quite close to the back there and the general discomfort in the woodland at the moment. The strain it is under. I probably didn't feel like I wanted to take or capture those parts. I think I have potentially filtered and in some ways been very selective in the images I've taken and the way I have taken these ... things like the road, I was actively trying not to capture certain things. That's interesting you said earlier about the filtering, I mean I'm obviously filtering, and I almost feel like there is a certain amount of glamorising as well in what I've not taken. I'm interested in why I didn't take pictures beyond this point because this isn't the end of the walk. (Gary, Participant)

4.5.4 Fieldnotes: The role of reflective practice

Within qualitative research it is recommended that the researcher reflects on their positionality, in that, what are their influences, biases, socio-political context and how these may influence the methods used and the interpretation of the data produced with participants (DeLyser, 2010). Frechette et al (2020) propose the use of a reflective journal in phenomenological research as a safe space for the researcher to attune to their positionality and converse with themselves about the research process, including the settings of the research and the engagements with participants.

In my field journal, I reflected on the process of data production, firstly, to check the interviews were an inclusive and empowering process for participants. Secondly, that I was staying grounded within the participants' lived experiences during the interviews to ensure the data produced represented the breadth and depth of their lived experiences rather than my own interests (Frechette et al., 2020). For example, several participants did not have children and a part of me wondered if this was a difficult aspect of their lives (as childlessness has been in mine) and if so, did their nature-based wellbeing practices help with this. However, none of the participants raised this, and so I remained with their perspective and narrative, as it is their perception of their lived experiences, I am interested in.

I was aware of their comment around being aware of being single and friends and family having children, and my own childlessness. I decided to use the participant's words and enquire that way, as I did around other areas and how these experiences connected to wellbeing and the intervention. I was pleased I was able to do this, as it meant I was following the participant's led and not introducing my own agenda around an area I am not researching, but instead personally connected to. (Fieldnote, 29 October 2020)

Thirdly, I used my field journal to consider whether any aspects of the participants' responses appeared significant regarding understanding what occurs at nature-based interventions and during participants long-term wellbeing (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The aim was to hold these ideas loosely, to ensure the data analysis remained grounded in the participants' lived experiences rather than influenced by my perspective and categorised too quickly (Groenewald, 2016). For example, through reflecting on my interviews with facilitators, I recognised a warmth in their approach, which appeared a common theme:

There was a sense of warmth and care about what they do and who they work with - of going beyond the 'role' (this feels like a common theme, especially during lockdown and keeping in touch with participants) - and they are connected to the people who attend via care for them. As well as being flexible

and adaptive to the participants, in terms of what the participants want to do at the projects, which they felt created an accepting environment, which reduce stigma around mental health, clothing etc. (Fieldnote, 11 January 2021)

As with all facilitators, I felt a sense of warmth, a care for the people/group/community/project and a willingness to meet people on their terms, whilst encouraging them week by week without pressure. (Fieldnote, 22 March 2021)

Finally, to reflect on my own wellbeing, throughout the fieldwork I found a reflective field journal useful for checking in with myself regarding any impacts on my emotions, thoughts, and personal biography, and how these factors also impacted my fieldwork.

I am enjoying connecting with organisations, facilitators, and potential participants. It is good to have that engagement, especially in the current situation, where, for me, social activities have been reduced. Though, it is also a quick shift from working on my own to chatting with others and that takes a toil, as it involves giving out a lot. This is something I have already noted and so, for me, it is about self-care and having different activities to do alongside the recruitment. (Fieldnote, 15 October 2020)

The writing of fieldnotes is part of taking a reflexive approach to recognising my role in the production of data with participants and how I interpreted this data, recognising the influence of my personal and professional experiences and values (Braun and Clarke, 2013). As I have shown above and throughout this chapter, through the extracts from my field journal, a reflective field journal supports ethical, attentive, and empowering research that contributes to producing a rich dataset.

4.5.5 Responding to disruption: Remote research

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic I had to engage with a remote approach for the data production. In transitioning to a remote approach my focus was on ensuring that the

research remained as inclusive as possible. As such, I decided to transfer my in-person approach as simply as possible to remote forms of communication, as I did not want to restrict participants being able to take part on the basis of technology (smart phone, computer), technological literacy, or internet access. This was especially important for my research as some of the participants of nature-based interventions maybe considered vulnerable, which includes their education or socioeconomic circumstances, which may mean they have reduced access to technology or little technological literacy. My aim was to keep the technology involved accessible, simple to use, and widely available. In support of this aim, I first discuss the use of online videoconferencing technology and telephones for conducting interviews. Then, I consider how participants completing the creative and visual methods in their own time and not in the presence of a researcher can affect the data produced.

Remote synchronous interviews have occurred by telephone from at least the 1980s (Block and Erskine, 2012; Watson and Lupton, 2022), and more recently since 2008, internet-based video-calling technology has been utilised, for example, Skype and Zoom (Archibald et al., 2019; Hanna and Mwale, 2017). Since then, online videoconferencing technology has been used in a range of research areas, for example, sustainable tourism (Hanna, 2012), and digital technology (Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst, 2017). The breath of research areas expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic, to include the process of ageing (Tomás and Bidet, 2023) and student homelessness (Roberts et al., 2021). Researchers have reported telephone, Skype, and Zoom interviews as being convenient and flexible, firstly, as remote interviews are easier to arrange to fit in with participants' schedules, and secondly, they remove any travel arrangements for both the researcher and participant, reducing the associated financial and times costs (Archibald et al., 2019; Block and Erskine, 2012; Engward et al., 2022; Keen et al., 2022). In my research, participants appreciated being able to fit interviews around their work, study, and/or personal commitments, with interviews taking place during the day, evenings, and at weekends. Remote interviews can also support more geographically diverse and inclusive calls for participants, though not all participants will be able to engage with the associated technology (Engward et al., 2022; Keen et al., 2022; Khan and MacEachen, 2022). For this research, increasing my

call for participants across the UK, due to switching to a remote approach, did help recruitment and confirms this beneficial aspect of utilising a remote approach.

Researchers have also recognised possible challenges involved in remote interviewing. For example, Rubin and Rubin (2012) propose that developing a relationship is more difficult by telephone than face to face due to the lack of visual cues and difficulties in engaging in small talk to develop rapport. However, videoconferencing can provide some visual clues (depending on what aspects of the person is on screen), which can promote rapport as body language can be responded to by both the participant and the researcher, supporting the development of rich data (Archibald et al., 2019; Hanna and Mwale, 2017). During the videoconferencing interviews I found being able to respond to participants' facial expressions helpful in developing rapport, as well as deepening my understandings of their experiences. For example:

Jilly: I think it's just the power of the benefits are strong enough for me to want to do it again. (Andy: Ok) So, you know they're good enough, they give me enough enjoyment and all of those things which mean that I want to do them regularly.

Andy: Yeah, and when you talk there's a smile and it feels like there's a glow (Jilly: It is, it is) and so for you to maintain, to keep up those activities it's 'cause they give you those benefits?

Jilly: Yeah, they give me a huge amount and yes, I just, you know if somebody took those activities away, I mean maybe I could find others that did the same, but I'm not quite sure what they would be that would give that whole grouping of things.

Rapport can also be developed through everyday interactions, for example, sharing a cup of tea or engaging with the participant's pet, which support participants to feel at ease, develop confidence in their answers, and allow the conversation to comfortably flow and unfold (Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst, 2017). In my videoconferencing

interviews, Charley, our cat, regularly appeared during the interviews. For example, in my interview with Anne, a facilitator:

Soon after the start of the interview Charley popped up on screen and meowed. Anne responded by smiling and laughing as I apologised for Charley jumping up. Anne followed by replying, '*[I]t is alright I'm likely to have one as well come in*' and we both laughed. Anne's cat appeared later on and was greeted by our smiles and laughter.

Charley's appearances rather than unsettle the interviews helped build rapport through injecting some small talk with participants about cats, pets, and interruptions – an aspect people were common with due to using videoconferencing for work meetings and social calls. I am aware seeing pets may not facilitate rapport for all, but within these interviews, Charley's appearances did have a beneficial effect in contributing to affective and comfortable conversations for the participants and myself.

Hanna and Mwale (2017) also propose that Skype provides a shared public space between the participant and the researcher, whilst also remaining 'private' for the participant as they remain separate from the researcher, proposing this may reduce the power imbalance as the researcher is not physically with them, which may have been uncomfortable or intimidating for the participant. Meanwhile, Jenner et al (2019) found that Skype can provide as affective private setting as private in-person interviews, which resulted in participants sharing deeply personal experiences. The authors suggest that Skype did not negatively affect the development of rapport between the interviewer and the participants. A finding that resonates with Oliffe et al.'s (2021) study of men's experiences of relationship breakdowns, where the men shared in detail their experiences via Zoom. The men also reported feeling comfortable during the Zoom interviews as they were in their own homes, which some men perceived as supporting their openness. However, these technologies do also take the participant and the researcher 'into' each other's spaces, especially if the blurring function is not engaged to 'hide' the environment. As such, there is still potential for participants and researchers to feel uncomfortable in each other's spaces.

A final common difficulty reported regarding specifically videoconferencing are technical difficulties and disruptions. This includes the quality of the internet connection for maintaining a call with good audio and visual quality and that stays synchronised between the two users (Hanna and Mwale, 2017; Oliffe et al., 2021; Tomás and Bidet, 2023). I used an ethernet cable to help offset these difficulties from my end. However, difficulties in connecting and/or breakages in connection, which results in screen freezes, whilst disruptive and can affect the quality of the recording, can also facilitate the development of rapport through joint-problem solving (Archibald et al., 2019). An aspect, which can reduce technical difficulties is to use a programme that is familiar, simple, and user-friendly to use. For example, Archibald et al (2019) reported that participants found Zoom easy to connect to and appreciated the strong privacy and security options available. As such, it is important to consider which software package will be most effective for the researcher and participants (Longhurst, 2016). A decision, which is intricately linked with the researcher's ethical considerations and a university's ethical procedure (see section 4.7.1), which can result in compromises and the researcher developing mitigation strategies, for example, providing participants with detailed technical notes for using an unfamiliar videoconferencing platform (see Appendix D).

During creative and visual activities, the researcher is often viewed as facilitating the activity, which is being completed by the participant, with the researcher often alongside them observing and guiding the participant's process (Bagnoli, 2009; Mannay, 2016; Worth, 2011). When these activities are completed without the researcher being present it can influence how and what the participants create and may contribute to richer accounts of participants' lived experiences (Bremner, 2020; Pell et al., 2020). This could include participants being able to work at their own pace; to be able to reflect on their creations over the course of a few days; and to self-edit their work and rework it away from the researcher's gaze, so that they can amend things without risking potentially difficult questions from the observing researcher. For example, Bremner (2020) found in his study involving take home timelines, that the participants appreciated having time to understand the instructions and think about

the activity and the experiences they were sharing. Participants noted being able to process the activity in their own time allowed them to produce timelines which reflected their life history. Meanwhile, Pell et al. (2020) report in their study involving timelines and interviews by telephone, that the participants did not share the timelines with the researcher before or after the interview. As such the participants could choose what to include and discuss from the timeline in the interview. Pell et al. (2020) suggest this empowerment of participants and control over their experiences led to a trade-off between the rich narratives produced and not having the visual data that underpinned the interviews to support data analysis. I risked this trade-off myself as I gave the participants the choice of sharing their life map with me, as it was important to me that the participants felt in control of their stories and participation in the research process. In the end, 14 out of 15 of the participants did share their life map with me.

For both the life map and photography activities I purposefully provided broad guidance (see sections 4.5.2 and 4.5.3) for completing the activities as I was interested in the participant's interpretation of the activities and how they chose to represent their lived experiences from their perspective. Hall (2019) found in her research regarding austerity that using a deliberately vague approach to biographical mapping led to participants revealing the deep and sometimes complex aspects of their lives. Meanwhile, Bagnoli (2009) purposes that when the researcher is interested in how people approach and complete the same task, their way, focuses the data analysis on the individual's experience. Taking a remote and purposefully vague approach can also help reduce the power imbalance, as my influence on the participant and activity is reduced. However, this does not absolve all potential relations of power, as significant others to the participants may exert their own power and control on the participant during the life mapping activity and when taking photographs (Mannay, 2016). As such, in the accompanying interviews with the participants, alongside exploring with them what they chose to share and represent, I also explored their practice of completing the activities. As I believe it is important to understand how participants engaged with the activities, including if anybody else was involved and if there were any beneficial or detrimental effects from completing the activities. These enquiries can also support the development of my ethical practice when designing and implementing future research

methods. I further explore my ethical considerations of the role of participants and the researcher in section 4.7.

4.6 Data processing and analysis: Handling with care

As I have demonstrated my approach to data production involved collaboration with the participants to explore and remain grounded in their life history. This approach produced rich and in-depth data, however the analysis was not straightforward, due to the unique flow and co-creation of data involved in each interaction with a participant (Worth and Hardill, 2015). As such, my analysis of the data began with my reflective fieldnotes. I typed my fieldnotes in a Microsoft Word document after the interview. After each interview I recorded my impressions and reflections on how the interview unfolded, which aspects of the participant's responses appeared significant, and any ideas for data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Groenewald, 2016). Through these fieldnotes I began familiarising myself with the data produced in the interviews and, where applicable, through the creative and visual activities the participant's completed.

I used thematic analysis to identify and analyse themes within the interview data. The approach I took was based on Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021) systematic six phases of thematic analysis, which I used to guide my process of interpreting the data. I used NVivo 12 to organise and aid my thematic analysis of the data. I imported into NVivo my transcribed interviews and fieldnotes. NVivo 12 can aid transparency in the development of codes and themes through the organisational tools available (folders, memos, and descriptions) supporting the tracking of sources of data, so data segments can be considered in isolation and contextually which can aid interpretation (Bazeley, 2018).

The first phase involved becoming familiar with the data through transcribing and noticing what is interesting, including overall impressions, conceptual ideas, and specific issues within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2013). During fieldwork I began the process of transcribing the interviews, a process which was aided by the auto

caption function in Microsoft Teams. The use of automated transcript software may appear a missed opportunity to become familiar with the data. However, due to how the captions are produced, I had to go through each transcript removing the date and time stamp between every two to four seconds of automated captions to construct the basis of a useable transcript. This was the first step in becoming familiar with the interviews. Through repeated listening to the audio from the interviews I edited the transcripts to ensure they were accurate, verbatim accounts. On production of each transcript, I re-read them and added to my fieldnotes any additional impressions that arose through this process of familiarisation with the data. For participants, I also referred to the life maps they created and the photographs they took to support my re-reading of the transcripts.

Next, I coded the data to identify patterns within the data. I used a word or phrase to identify particular features of the data that were relevant to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2013). I coded the data line by line using an inductive and interpretive approach, developing codes that reflected both the participants' descriptions and meanings ('data-derived' codes) and ones that identify implicit meanings, which are informed by my theoretical framework ('researcher-derived' codes) (Braun and Clarke, 2013; 2021). Coding was an ongoing process, and I reviewed the codes at the end of coding the dataset by re-examining the data, as some of the codes I used had developed into or could be merged with other codes. I also reviewed my codes with my supervisors, who provided additional perspectives to interpreting the data.

The next three phases involved collating the codes into themes. Based on Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021) guidelines I created thematic maps to organise my thinking regarding the relationships between the codes and the developing themes. The themes were then reviewed in two stages, first, in relation to the data extracts to check they formed a coherent theme. Secondly, by re-reading the entire dataset to ascertain that the themes accurately reflected the meanings in the dataset based on my theoretical approach. I continued reviewing the themes until I identify the essence of each theme and how they related to one another in an overall narrative regarding answering the

research questions. These themes and the writing generated through the process of refining them by developing an individual narrative per theme, as well as an overarching narrative, formed the basis of the following three empirical chapters.

I have used quotes to evidence the themes I interpreted from the dataset, however, quotes typically represent a specific aspect of an event, relationship, or process captured by a theme (Bazeley, 2009). I am interested in understanding participants and facilitators' situated experiences of nature-based interventions. These lived experiences are complex and dynamic and cannot be fully captured through using quotes alone, rather the quality of the analysis was improved by situating the participants and facilitators' lived experiences within their lifecourse. Vignettes are often used when empirical examples are layered and relationally complex and can highlight the different personal, spatial, and temporal aspects involved (Hall, 2019; Valentine, 2007). As such I have also used vignettes to illustrate the events, relationships, and processes involved in participants' participation at nature-based interventions and the influence of that participation on their wellbeing across their lifecourse. Each of the vignettes presented are from one of the study participants but represents a range of themes from the dataset.

4.7 Ethics

I sought to engage with the participants with respect, care, and compassion through our interactions in producing the data. I view the participants as co-producers of the data and value their expertise regarding their lived experiences. To ensure their participation and the research was conducted ethically, the study was reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Science and Technology (FST) Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix E).

My approach to ethics is informed by an ethics of care, where ethical decisions are informed by care, compassion, and with the aim of benefiting the participants (Wiles, 2012). This involves an ethics in practice approach, where the context of an ethical dilemma is considered in responding to the situation the participant is in, and is

informed by the principles involved in obtaining institutional ethical approval (Harris and Rhodes, 2018). An ethics in practice approach can be complemented by a culture of care, which considers an empowering and relational accountability for participants and researchers in research (King, 2023). King (2023) proposes a culture of care requires responsibility is shared between the various boards and sections with universities and the researcher(s), so that the work involved in responding to ethical circumstances does not solely fall on the researcher(s). King suggests this approach can be at odds with University Research Ethics Committee's approach to research ethics through their focus on the setting and controlling of the procedures involved in ethical research. This can lead to an approach which involves box ticking and ensuring the research is approved, leading to researchers disconnecting with ethical practices (Hammersley, 2009). My ethical research approach was underpinned by care, which I experience as a relational act that enables maintaining, supporting, and repairing circumstances (Tronto and Fisher, 1990). For example, this ensured I was able to maintain my stance on inclusivity despite the FST Research Ethics Committee's technological restrictions for remote research (see section 4.7.1).

In this section, I first consider my ethical responsibility towards participants by discussing the mitigations I put in place to ensure my remote approach was inclusive; how I managed the potential emotional risks to participants; informed consent; anonymity; and data handling. I then discuss my self-care strategies and the challenges I faced conducting research during a global pandemic.

4.7.1 Ethics of care: Participants

For my remote research, my preference was to use online videoconferencing in place of in-person interviews, with the telephone as an alternative mode of communication. Whilst using the telephone removes visual clues, which may affect the richness of the data, it improves the inclusivity of the call for participants, which may enhance the quality and reliability of the overall dataset. I was keen to use a videoconferencing platform that was popular and potentially familiar to participants, namely Zoom. I was also keen to use WhatsApp, a popular and familiar messaging service, to facilitate ease

of communication with participants, especially for sharing their life maps and photographs with me. However, I was informed by the FST Research Ethics Committee that the university did not support the use of Zoom or WhatsApp and I would have to use Microsoft Teams and Microsoft OneDrive, which are supported by the Information Support Services and approved for research by Lancaster University. I understood the committee's reasoning due to concerns regarding third party data storage, participant privacy and confidentiality, and minimising the risk from potential data hacks and cyber-interruptions (Zoombombing), as has been recognised in remote research (e.g., Keen et al., 2022; Khan and MacEachen, 2022). However, my concerns for inclusivity and accessibility were not discussed, whilst discussions may not have changed matters for my research, it is important for the development of ethical and careful research that concerns are recognised, heard, and acted on (Dyer and Demeritt, 2009; Hammersley, 2009; King, 2023). Instead, I was left with the responsibility to ensure this technology, which was unfamiliar to myself, would not adversely impact who could take part in my research. To mitigate this and to support participants I created detailed guidance documents for Microsoft Teams (Appendix D) and Microsoft OneDrive (Appendix F) and informed participants I was available through email and phone to support connecting to Microsoft Teams and sharing documents through Microsoft OneDrive. This approach underlines my desire for inclusive and accessible research and care towards participants.

Research which involves personal experiences and sensitive topics can be risky for both participants and researchers and whilst I could not predict in advance what aspects may cause distress, I could prepare for and manage the research process to ensure minimal risk (Wiles, 2012). For example, with the life mapping and photography activity I provided guidance for the participants regarding taking care of themselves during and after the activity (see Appendices B and C). Emotional risk can occur during data production, in response to the questions asked during an interview and during an activity, and include a range of responses, including worry, embarrassment, and a sense of not being able to do what is being asked (Wiles, 2012). Participants responses also involve their memories and experiences and there is a risk of harm for them when recalling past experiences (Harris and Rhodes, 2018). However, taking part in research

can also be empowering for participants, providing an opportunity for them to talk to someone interested in their experiences and for their story to be heard, from which they may gain insights into their experiences (Kvale, 2007; Wiles, 2012). Consequently, during the interviews I monitored the participants' engagement and checked for signs of distress and tiredness, which included offering to pause the interview and to resume later and/or the option to decline to answer the question. For example, with one participant, due to their health, I agreed to complete the interview in 30-minute blocks and to check in with them as we went along regarding if they wanted a break or to stop and to continue another day. As it turned out, the participant was able to complete the interview in one sitting. I also checked that all participants were ready to finish when the interview ended and return to their everyday through asking them 'how they found the interview?' and 'how they are feeling?' to bring our intimate interaction to a close.

Before a study participant can take part in research, informed consent from the study participant is required. Informed consent involves providing information, which is understandable and in plain language, and about what taking part in the study will involve. Specifically, what the project is about, what study participants are required to do, possible benefits and disadvantages from taking part, how the results will be disseminated, as well as making it clear that taking part is voluntary and the withdrawal policy (Dowling, 2016; Wiles, 2012). To ensure study participants were able to provide informed consent I provided people who expressed an interest in the study information about the research and the chance to discuss the research with me in advance of agreeing to participate, as well as during the research. As I worked with gatekeepers I felt it was important to provide study participants the opportunity to discuss the research and taking part in their own time, to allow them to explore their decision away from any potential influences from a gatekeeper (Wiles, 2012). I provided study participants with the consent form in advance of the first creative activity and interview, giving them at least seven days to complete the consent form, so that they had time to reflect on what they were consenting to. I approached informed consent as an ongoing process, where I checked with study participants their consent throughout the research, as this ensured study participants were providing informed consent at each stage of the study (Wiles, 2012). This meant that study participants

were aware at each stage that they could decline to answer particular questions, and/or take a break if required and return to it afterwards, and/or withdraw during the interview process.

All study participants were given the choice to choose a pseudonym or be identified by their name. This choice was offered to study participants as I recognised study participants may wish to be identified so that their contribution to the research can be recognised. Pseudonyms are an aspect of anonymity, through which the researcher anonymise particular details to maintain the study participants privacy, as well as protect them from potential negative effects of disclosure through the publication of their contribution to the research (Wilson, 2021a). Anonymity can enable study participants to take part, but for other study participants being identified is an important aspect of their participation, including how they are represented in the presentation of the research, which can be empowering for those study participants (Swerts, 2021). For example, several study participants voiced they wanted to be identified by their own name as they had chosen to participate in the research as their experience at a nature-based intervention was important to them and they wanted their stories of beneficial change to be heard, shared, and potentially inspire others.

A data management plan that ensures the study participants data is stored securely, analysed, and presented with integrity is recommended to ensure study participants anonymity and they have confidence in the research process (Wilson, 2021b). A data management plan was included in my research ethics application. This included, that the data was stored on an approved and restricted filestore on a Lancaster University server, with access only for myself and my two supervisors. As I was working at home due to restrictions in place because of COVID-19 I worked in a closed room and used headphones to maintain confidentiality when transcribing the audio files. In presenting the data I have removed identifying information where applicable and, in the cases, where study participants wished to be identified by their name, I have only used their first names.

4.7.2 Ethics of care: Researcher

I also needed to ensure I considered my emotional wellbeing, as through empathising with participants and emotionally investing in attentively listening to and valuing their experiences could impact on how I felt and leave me feeling distressed (Kumar and Cavallaro, 2018; Wiles, 2012). Recommendations for managing researcher's emotional wellbeing includes managing the number of interviews undertaken each week (Rager, 2005a; Wiles, 2012). This was especially important as I was working at home and there was no travel for interviews, which can provide down-time, but also forces interviews to be spaced out. On a couple of occasions, I did have two interviews on the same day or would sometimes go straight from an interview to another aspect of my PhD or a meeting. From this, there was an accumulate effect resulting in feelings of burn-out after the first few months of interviewing. As such, the festive break was greeted with open arms, but the sense of burn-out also affected how quickly I returned to my fieldwork in January 2021, as it took me a while to regain my equilibrium.

Maintaining a satisfying life-research balance through self-care strategies is another important aspect for researchers to consider for their emotional wellbeing (Rager, 2005b). As I discussed in section 4.5.4, I found a reflective field journal useful for supporting my wellbeing. I also gained tremendous emotional and social support through daily walks with my wife and cuddling our cats – both activities provided me with a sense of perspective, moments of joy, and connection. This was especially important during a time (COVID-19 pandemic) when researching, and life in general felt very isolating. However, the COVID-19 pandemic also provided me and the participants with common ground, which supported small talk and rapport between us, through sharing experiences of working at home; using videoconferencing for work and socialising; and the role of nature as part of our daily exercise. Sharing these experiences with participants supported checking in with the participants at the end of the interviews and reminding myself of the need to take a break from the screen and go outside for my own wellbeing.

Having good self-care strategies in place is especially important during traumatic life events during research (Kumar and Cavallaro, 2018). Sadly, and unexpectedly one of our cats, Charley, died towards the end of my fieldwork. Due, to being inconsolable and not able to facilitate affective interview spaces I had to postpone the final few interviews and contact the relevant participants. Being honest with the participants about why I was postponing the interviews helped them to understand. I am grateful for their kindness and respecting my need for space, by agreeing to the postponements, despite the disruptions to their schedules. Long walks and reflective writing helped me move towards a position to be able to co-create and hold an affective interview space.

On the 7 May I had to say goodbye to Charley. It was heart-breaking and I am still heartbroken. I am really missing her companionship and company. She would come and find me every morning and jump up onto the table for head tickles and to be with me. ... She used to walk all over the keyboard, so I would have to push it back, so she could sit near me, and I would type around her. And now she isn't physically here with me. I feel her love in my heart, but my arms ache without her and my lap feels so empty. ... Today was my first interview since I lost her and I find I give out a lot in the interviews and one way to recover was to spend some time with Charley, though she may have already found me and appeared in the interview or just sat down on my notes. Today I sat outside in the garden to be with her and that helped, but it was tough to do it alone and not have her alongside me. (Fieldnote, 17 May 2021)

During the interview that day, the participant referred to their cat when offering an analogy regarding the uniqueness of the community gardens they attended. As, I had been honest about my situation and begun processing my grief, my emotions were not ambushed by ES's reference to her cat and her analogy. Instead, I very much got what she meant, due to the depth of my own loss.

ES: ... [Y]ou can't get a new cat to replace your old cat and expect it to be exactly the same, and I know that it's like a really sad, oh god sorry that was a really

bad analogy, (Andy: It's ok 'cause I told you) I was thinking about mine to be honest (A: I understand) sorry (A: I get that). ...

Andy: ... No worries about the analogy I totally get what you're saying. (ES: Yeah, sorry I didn't mean that) No, it's totally ok, 'cause I remember you talking about your cat early on, so I get what you mean (ES: Yeah).

My sense of being a researcher is connected to my 'therapist self' and my 'personal self'. It is not wise or possible to separate out these different aspects of my sense of self, instead I recognise that they all inform my ethical and caring approach to research, and the stories I tell through my research (Bondi and Fewell, 2017). These stories include personal moments of challenge, isolation, and grief, and it is important, to me, to be open and honest about these challenges and my emotional responses. As, it is through understanding and valuing our own experience that supports us to lean unobtrusively into other people's worlds and produce rich data together. Whilst I recognise the importance of self-awareness and personal development, it is not the sole responsibility of the researcher to ensure ethical research. Instead, responsibility needs to be shared between the actors involved to support and care for researchers as well as participants throughout often complex and dynamic fieldwork. By sharing my experiences I add my voice to the dismantling of the isolation that can occur during a PhD (Gill and Medd, 2013) and support a wider dialogue about the personal and institutional challenges involved in research (Butler-Rees and Robinson, 2020). This in turns support the calls for a culture of care (King, 2023) and for networked self-care in academia (Jones and Whittle, 2021).

4.8 Conclusion

Through my research I sought to explore and understand the affective psychosocial processes at nature-based interventions, and the long-term effects on participants' wellbeing from participating at nature-based interventions. I have demonstrated that undertaking a phenomenologically informed qualitative approach supported answering my research questions regarding the above phenomena. This occurred through

positioning the study participants as the experts on their lived experience. Through this focus I was able to explore with the study participants the factors they perceived are involved in affective psychosocial processes and spaces at nature-based interventions and the role of these in influencing participants' long-term wellbeing. Recognising study participants as experts and valuing their situated living experience was influenced by my experience as a person-centred psychotherapist. This experience also influenced my warm, caring, and inclusive approach to interviewing study participants.

I found the in-depth interviews provided an empowering experience for the study participants, which was supported by utilising creative and visual activities. These activities firstly, enriched the interviews through situating the participants experiences. Secondly, the activities facilitated participants to direct the interviews, which uncovered new knowledge about the long-term influences from participating at nature-based interventions. Finally, keeping fieldnotes supplemented my regular reflective practice, which supported me to stay grounded in the participants' worlds and with their lived experiences. It is these lived experiences that are the subject of the following three empirical chapters.

Chapter 5 Beginnings: Situating facilitators' and participants' encounters at nature-based interventions

5.1 Introduction

Researchers of nature-based interventions have paid little attention to two key components of nature-based interventions, facilitators and participants, and their influence on co-creating affective experiences. Researchers' focus has instead typically been on describing the components of nature, activities, and social interaction as the affective qualities, and attributing improvements to participants' wellbeing to them (e.g., O'Brien, 2018; Pálsdóttir et al., 2018; Sudmann, 2018). I propose by turning our attention to facilitators and participants we can go beyond attributing characteristics to in-the-moment respite and restoration to understanding the intra- and interpersonal qualities involved in the co-creation of transformational experiences at nature-based interventions. By focusing on the experiences of the people involved at nature-based interventions I consider how participating co-creates long-term shifts in participants' sense of self, wellbeing practices, and sense of belonging over the lifecourse. As such, in this first empirical chapter, I focus on situating facilitators and participants in their biographies in order to contextualise their interactions at nature-based interventions. In subsequent chapters, I build on this discussion to consider the qualities of affective interactions (Chapter 6) and the influence of these on participants' becoming (Chapter 7). To frame my critical discussion across my empirical chapters, I draw on my novel interdisciplinary approach which expands the geographical concept of therapeutic landscapes by considering person-centred psychotherapy's conceptualisations of the person and the therapeutic relationship (see Chapter 3). Through this approach I develop nuanced understandings of the relational processes involved in, first, participants' therapeutic experiences, and secondly, the co-creation of transformations to participants' becoming.

At nature-based interventions, therapeutic environments and experiences are co-created, however as I recognised in my review of the nature-based interventions literature (see Chapter 2) the role of facilitators and participants has largely been

ignored by researchers. Meanwhile, in psychotherapy the therapist's competency and the depth of the client's participation have been found to account for the most variation in therapeutic outcomes (Bohart and Tallman, 2010; Hubble et al., 2010). For facilitators, contextualising their experience provides insights into their qualifications, lived experiences, motivations, and beliefs, and how these influence participants' experiences at nature-based interventions. For example, within successful psychotherapy the role of belief is acknowledged as influencing therapeutic relationships and outcomes. As, when therapists deliver therapeutic activities that are consistent with their own beliefs and values, these engage and inspire clients by explaining their difficulties and providing hope for change (Hubble et al., 2010). Whilst a few studies have recognised the role of the facilitator in contributing to safe and effective nature-based interventions through social interactions (McIver et al., 2018; Murray et al., 2019; Steigen et al., 2022), they do not consider how training, lived experiences, and beliefs influence these interactions. Harper's (2009) study of wilderness therapy considers whether the therapeutic alliance (relationship) influences therapeutic outcome: whilst the self-reported scores of clients suggested the relationship was significant it was not predictive of outcomes. Subsequently, Harper proposes further research regarding the leader/therapist's personality traits and which skills enhance therapeutic relationships with participants. Meanwhile, Juster-Horsfield and Bell (2022) report the importance of practitioners recognising the limits to their skills to ensure a safe and enabling environment for participants. Therefore, exploring and understanding facilitators' backgrounds provides a foundation for considering whether there are specific qualities which are embodied by facilitators, supporting affective facilitation across the various nature-based interventions.

Studies considering the impact of nature-based interventions on participants' mental wellbeing, often represent participants via a psychiatric diagnosis that reduces each unique participant to a set of symptoms, rather than considering participants' mental wellbeing as situated within their specific biography (e.g., Corazon et al., 2018b; Oh et al., 2018; Pálsdóttir et al., 2018). Due to this, the research findings are often reported through considering reductions in de-contextualized symptoms over the short-term as a proxy for improved wellbeing (Kim and Park, 2018; Marselle et al., 2019; Rogerson et

al., 2020). Whilst reductions in symptoms (expressions of distress) is beneficial for participants, this focus on the expressions means the influence on participants' underlying distress, and capability to deal with future distress, is unknown. Consequently, so is the longevity of the short-term wellbeing that is reported. Therefore, to consider the long-term effects of participating at nature-based interventions requires understanding how participants across their lifecourse perceive and experience their mental wellbeing, including experiences of distress. This requires situating participants' experience of nature-based interventions in their ongoing biography to explore the influence of participation on the maintenance and enhancement of their wellbeing, not only at the time of the intervention, but also across their lifecourse. Subsequently, contextualising facilitators' and participants' involvement with nature-based interventions addresses the research gap regarding the role of facilitators and participants as components of these complex assemblages and understanding how long-term wellbeing benefits occur through active participation at a nature-based intervention.

I begin by contextualising the role of facilitators at nature-based interventions, through exploring their backgrounds, previous work experience, motivations, and beliefs and the influence of these factors in shaping therapeutic encounters. I follow by situating participants in their biography by considering the role of participants' intentions and motivations for joining a nature-based intervention for maintaining and enhancing their mental wellbeing. Next, I explore the influence of their lived experience of their childhood nature encounters and experience of home and school on their participation at nature-based interventions. I conclude by recognising the value of situating facilitators and participants' involvement demonstrates firstly, the presence of two common factors (care and nature connectedness) between facilitators at the various nature-based interventions. Secondly, the agency of participants' in engaging with nature-based interventions as third places for the benefit of their short and long-term mental wellbeing. As such, I establish the importance of situating people in their ongoing biographies as a fundamental part of understanding therapeutic landscape experiences, such as those at nature-based interventions.

5.2 Facilitators: Different routes, similar approaches

Facilitators are a key component of nature-based interventions, working closely with participants to support their participation. However, there is no single recognised training programme, skillset required or regulation of facilitators' practice and continuing professional development. As such, facilitators have wide-ranging backgrounds regarding their personal experience (e.g., environmental conservation, gardening, mental health), education (e.g., environmental studies, horticultural, outdoor studies), specific training (e.g., ecotherapy, social and therapeutic horticultural) and previous work (e.g., farming, psychology, social work). This wide range of experience maps onto person specifications for facilitator roles, which often request experience of working with groups, knowledge of environmental and wellbeing initiatives, excellent interpersonal skills and a relevant further or higher education qualification (TCV, 2023b; The Wildlife Trust, 2023). As these roles encompass delivery and development of nature-based interventions for a range of people with different needs, managing budgets and securing funding, producing reports, and promoting the organisation. Regardless of the level of responsibility and skills required, these roles pay below the median wage (£33,000 in 2022) (Office for National Statistics, 2022), and whilst there are permanent roles, they also are often temporary and short-term (see figure 5.1).

About the role



The Senior Project Officer role at TCV enables people and communities to improve their health, prospects, and outdoor places. This is achieved by managing TCV projects and delivering one or more services which contribute to local operational plans and towards the achievement of [TCV's Strategic Plan](#). The key to achieving this is the successful recruitment and management of volunteers, the management of resources and budgets, and managing external relationships and/or the local site/project(s).

- £22,880 FTE (£13,728)
- Part time
- 21 hours per week (flexible hours due to nature of delivery)
- Fixed term until 31 March 2024
- Project development, Green Gym delivery and support across Bo'ness
- Community engagement in disadvantaged areas
- Reporting and evaluation of community engagement projects
- Community/school outreach with new and hard to reach groups. Working with a variety of young people from Bo'ness Academy
- Running events, practical conservation skills including woodland management, gardening/food growing, wood working skills eg. building raised beds and planters
- The project will be delivered from Kinneil estate



Figure 5.1 An example of a job advert for a facilitator placed in June 2023 (TCV, 2023b)

At nature-based interventions, nature is deemed to be the connecting characteristic between the various types of nature-based interventions available. However, when considering facilitators, I perceived two further common connections present in facilitators' approach across the range of nature-based interventions. These common factors are firstly, care for participants shown through facilitators' interest in participants' wellbeing and a desire to provide affective activities and spaces for them. Secondly, the facilitators' valuing of a reciprocal nature connection and belief it can provide participants with a long-term relationship that can support their wellbeing in various ways. Both common factors influence facilitators' motivations to be involved in nature-based interventions and how these spaces are facilitated. The above diversity of informal and formal experiences and skills indicates the possibility of a diverse range of approaches, which could influence participants' therapeutic experience. However, despite this diversity in facilitators' backgrounds, their approaches appear to be similar due to being founded on care and nature connectedness, which contributes to the co-creation of affective spaces.

I start with a vignette describing Anne's experience of being involved in nature-based interventions. This vignette, whilst capturing one of the facilitator's experiences is presented here as it also reflects aspects of all the facilitators I interviewed, as well as comments made by the participants of nature-based interventions regarding the facilitation of the activities and spaces. The vignette highlights the common ground between facilitators regarding their previous experiences, motivation, and nature connection. I will draw out particular experiences throughout the following sections.

Anne is a Garden Project Officer with a national conservation organisation and has been working for them for six years, employed on various individually funded projects involving gardening and walking groups. Anne has had a few previous jobs, including working as a consultant ecologist, a dramatherapist, and in further education, with these previous careers influencing how Anne works as a project officer. The work is precarious, with Anne noting the area is under-invested and poorly paid; she has been made redundant twice, before being reprieved through being transferred to another project. Anne stays as she enjoys the work and views it as very important due to the beneficial effects she witnesses through people engaging with each other and the outdoors.

Anne began with setting up the gardening group, which was focused on the needs of the people attending rather than on the maintenance of the space. Anne then created a walking group due to her understanding of the health benefits a person develops from engaging with natural environments. She was also motivated by a desire to share her knowledge of ecology to enable people to learn about the environment and wildlife identification. In Anne's view being with nature creates a unifying experience through people sharing their responses to watching wildlife, birds, and noticing plants and trees. Anne is keen to empower people through this approach, supporting them to share their knowledge, build their self-confidence and to flourish.

Anne's care for the participants was highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, where Anne recognised the importance of maintaining a connection between the participants and a place they valued. Anne and the other project officers provided seeds, plants, and food parcels for the participants. Anne also started a weekly newsletter and would call participants she hadn't heard from, to keep the connection to the project going and to check in on their wellbeing.

Finally, Anne recognises that participants' progression is also dependent on a person's context and whether the coming together of personal and structural factors are enabling or disabling. Progression is defined by the participants, depending on what each person wants to gain from their attendance, which may involve long-term attendance of the group as it is a safe space in which to express themselves. However, this definition may conflict with a funder's concept of progression - involving participants attending for a set period of time, developing beneficial wellbeing from their attendance, and then moving onto other activities. This difference can create a tension between Anne's own values and the terms of the funding regarding how participation is viewed and who it is for.

5.2.1 Common factor: Care

I noted in Anne's vignette a strong thread of care in her proactive approach to engaging with the participants. This caring approach was also underpinned by all the facilitators' desire to help participants with their circumstances and offer life enriching experiences, providing a source of motivation. This caring approach aligns with Leck et al.'s (2014) findings that a primary motivation for UK care farmers was to be able to make a positive difference in the lives of the vulnerable participants – a desire often informed by a range of personal issues and experiences.

I suppose it's about enabling people to make good choices and move forward and live happily really. I think if you've lived happily yourself, you want that for other people. (Carol, Facilitator, Community Allotment)

For Carol, different aspects from her background contributed to her starting an allotment space to support people's wellbeing through growing fruit and vegetables. This included: her desire to give back and offer people opportunities to improve their health and wellbeing, due to enjoying a 'good life'; her enjoyment of gardening, developed through gardening with her granddad and parents (Carol is a self-taught gardener with no formal training); and her experience as a housing support officer that informed her focus on people who have experienced homelessness. Carol noted for people who have been homeless, the long-term housing situation typically means people will be housed with no access to an outdoor space as part of their home. Through the provision of a growing space Carol witnessed wellbeing benefits at the time of the activity which echoes research findings, for example, participants developing a sense of achievement through growing food from seed or supporting their emotional regulation through physical activity – working through frustrations via digging (Milligan et al., 2004; Toews et al., 2018).

Carol's intention is also to provide potential longer-term benefits to participants, through influencing and supporting participants' food choices by supporting participants' growing skills; developing participants' food and cooking knowledge; and increasing their access to fresh food. Carol reported that through food growing participants connected to memories, accessing forgotten knowledge regarding growing and/or cooking, as well as developing healthy eating habits, which they enjoy. This resonates with findings at other nature-based interventions, where access to and connection with food, alongside improved food knowledge supports participants' wellbeing (Besterman-Dahan et al., 2021; Gorman and Cacciatore, 2020). Gorman and Cacciatore's (2020) study involving a care farm for people affected by traumatic grief found that the participants developed healthier dietary choices, which included eating less meat and choosing plant-based diets. Participants considered these changes as enabling nourishing self-care, which supported the processing of their traumatic grief,

and as providing a (re)connection to values of care and compassion in their food choices, which supported living more authentically. Meanwhile, veterans at a community garden became more proactive with their dietary choices, and developed purpose and confidence through learning new skills, which connected to future aspirations for a meaningful life (e.g., self-sufficiency and off-grid living) (Besterman-Dahan et al., 2021). When a person's response to their experiences and practices aligns their self-concept with their organism there is less dissonance between their organismic valuing process and their choices. This reduces a person's emotional distress and enables appropriate responses to situations, including having confidence and trust in oneself to deal with emotional difficulties and to live with meaning and purpose (Rogers, 1961; Tudor and Worrall, 2006). As such, Carol's commitment to care for the participants is a driver in the provision of an affective environment, which provides opportunities for marginalised people within society to access activities that support long-term improvements to self-worth and constructive practices for self-care (Moriggi et al., 2020; Murray et al., 2019).

This desire to assist people with reducing barriers to attainment and fulfilment was a strong theme in the interviews with the facilitators.

I realised that all the people I was working with, their barriers to achieving what they wanted to do was to do with things that happen to them at home. That was all in the back of my mind that I thought that if you could help that, then you would remove a big barrier to getting on in life. (Jane, Facilitator, Social and Therapeutic Horticulturist)

I very much like the idea of being able to help and provide and steward people, who are perhaps a little bit less fortunate in life, perhaps suffered with mental illness and feel that they've got nothing to do in life, and so it's nice for me to be able to provide this positive role for them if you like, help them and bring them back from the dark places that they might be in. (Clive, Facilitator, Environmental Conservation)

For Jane, from her previous work providing academic support in an FE college, she recognised aspects in young people's home lives were affecting their self-confidence and behaviour (expression of inappropriate anger and causing disturbances) at college. This recognition played a role in her training as a social and therapeutic horticulturist as she wants to help young people to flourish. Whilst Clive, a former dairy farmer, discussed enjoying providing affective interactions, which support improvements to participants' self-confidence, skills, and communication. Jane and Clive's care towards participants, whilst informed by different lived experiences, again highlights the role of warmth in engaging with participants and supporting participants to embark on their process of personal growth. The facilitators' care for participants expresses more than wanting them to enjoy their participation, as it also conveys a genuine interest in their life and wellbeing (Knox and Cooper, 2015; Moriggi et al., 2020).

Facilitators discussed nature-based interventions as providing alternative environments, for example, to home or school, where participants could experience relationships focused on their needs rather than, for example, the requirements of a curriculum. In these person-centred spaces participants are listened to and responded to by the facilitators explaining and adapting activities to meet their needs (Howarth et al., 2021; Steigen et al., 2022). As such, these spaces contrast to participants' everyday due to the facilitators recognising the participants as unique individuals and placing them at the centre of their experience. This way of relating respects participants' autonomy and can empower participants' sense of self, compared to, for example, home or school where their autonomy and experience can be marginalised through the mediating actions of parents and teachers, which can be disempowering (Knox and Cooper, 2015; Skelton and Valentine, 1998). This also creates positive roles for the participants, due to their participation being valued by facilitators and peers (Hassink et al., 2010; McIver et al., 2018). This care-informed approach can alter participants' sense of self through their perspectives being validated and supporting them to develop improved emotional awareness and regulation. This in-turn co-creates shifts in participants' self-identification, for example from feeling incompetent to being valued, which benefits participants' self-confidence and sense of purpose (Conlon et al., 2018; Kogstad et al., 2014).

The care facilitators' offer to participants also provides satisfaction for the facilitators, as indicated by Clive in the above quote. Facilitators by being part of participants' growth and development, perceive their role as meaningful, purposeful, and providing moments of joy, as well as contributing to the wider benefit of society through improving participants' lives.

[I]f you feel like you're helping someone out that's a fulfilling feeling for yourself too. If you feel like someone's getting something out [of] what you're doing, then that's a nice thing to do ... I guess feeling like you [are] contributing in some way to society for good. (Alasdair, Facilitator, Community Garden)

This sense of fulfilment contributes to the facilitators' sense of self-worth and identity and underpins their motivation for the role (Bjerregaard et al., 2017). As noted in Anne's vignette, facilitation of nature-based interventions is a precarious and low paid role, as such the intrinsic satisfaction developed by facilitators through their rewarding work may influence the high-satisfaction reported by the facilitators despite those working conditions, as has been reported with care workers (Bjerregaard et al., 2017).

I love it and it's just so important. (Jane, Facilitator, Social and Therapeutic Horticulturist)

[Y]ou start doing it and seeing people improve, you just keep wanting to do it and I'll be sad when it finishes. (Mhairi, Facilitator, Environmental Conservation and Ecotherapy)

[I]t's brilliant. I've seen some people really grow and develop and change and move forward and knowing that I am some small part of that. (Elaine, Facilitator, Environmental Conservation)

Several participants, whilst being aware of the precarity of these roles, later became facilitators of nature-based interventions partly due to the beneficial impacts of this

type of rewarding work on their sense of self and long-term wellbeing (see Chapter 7). This further suggests that a person's sense of doing valuable work, which enhances other people's lives is an important factor in being a facilitator.

[I]t's very strongly linked to how good I feel about myself, because it is such a rewarding job and I know that I'm noticing the difference to people's lives in the ways that made a difference to my life. (Colleen, Participant, Community Garden)

The care shown by facilitators towards participants was experienced by participants as being welcoming, friendly, and kind. These warm environments help participants to settle into the space, take part in the activities, and engage with the group at their own pace (Kogstad et al., 2014; McIver et al., 2018).

[S]he was incredibly nice too and she helped me get accommodated to the gardens and the overall layout and things like that. (ES, Participant, Community Gardens)

[T]hey were just very friendly and always good to have a chat to. (Daniel, Participant, Ecotherapy)

For some participants, the qualities of being warm and welcoming were aspects they embraced, which created shifts in their identity. These participants noted a channelling of the facilitators' welcoming, kind, and caring approach into their sense of self, which they express in their current roles.

[T]he lady who was coordinator when I started, she's been a mentor to me absolutely. When she took over the running of our organisation I moved into her position. I kind of mimic her almost, I took on her cheerful positive nature, made sure I was welcoming everyone. So yeah definitely, I had a really good mentor. Someone who I just thought 'oh I want to be like you', and I was able to do that and step into those shoes. (Colleen, Participant, Community Garden)

These reported experiences resonate with Murray et al.'s (2019) research at care farms that proposes that the farmer was significant in forming an open and relaxed environment through offering relationships characterised by the qualities of friendliness and a desire to help, which supported participants' personal growth and identity development. The facilitators' care for the participants is a significant factor in co-creating affective person-centred spaces, as well as providing motivation and satisfaction for the facilitators. Subsequently, nature-based interventions have the potential to be transformative as participants' actualising tendency is supported through the facilitators respecting the participants' autonomy and choices, which enables participants to explore which experiences are beneficial and which are diminishing to their sense of self (Rogers, 1951). In-turn, participants develop an internal locus of evaluation, deciding for themselves a way of being that is meaningful and purposeful and so move towards becoming responsible for their decisions, goals, and actions (Rogers, 1961). Another factor, which influences the therapeutic qualities of the space, and the facilitators' job satisfaction, is the facilitators' belief in nature connectedness, which I explore next.

5.2.2 Common factor: Belief in nature connectedness

As noted in the vignette, Anne discussed nature as offering a unifying experience, an experience all the facilitators are keen to co-create with the participants due to their belief in a reciprocal connection to nature - a relationship which supports both human and ecological health (Richardson, 2023). This belief is founded on the facilitators' own beneficial engagements with nature, as they recognised the benefits to their own wellbeing through being outdoors (Capaldi et al., 2014; McGuire et al., 2022). Several facilitators discussed engaging with nature-based hobbies (e.g., food growing, gardening, walking) to support their wellbeing.

I absolutely love nature myself and everything I really love doing is in nature and I think seeing the benefits for myself just like how much it makes me feel

good and then wanting to share that. (Mhairi, Facilitator, Environmental Conservation and Ecotherapy)

A few of the facilitators had also previously taken part in nature-based interventions. For example, Elaine facilitates an environmental conservation intervention where she started as a participant and found being active outdoors “*absolutely feeds my soul*”. Elaine continues this nourishing connection in her own time with regular solo walks, where she may not have a specific focus, but enjoys being with the birds and the weather in response to a “*need to be out there*” for her mental wellbeing.

The facilitators’ belief in nature connectedness co-creates therapeutic landscape experiences by enhancing the benefits of participating in meaningful activities through providing a focus on the opportunities to encounter and embrace nature as a beneficial actant in participants’ becoming. Within the psychotherapeutic literature, a therapist’s belief in the therapeutic approach offered is recognised as one of the four common factors involved in successful psychotherapy. It has been found that rather than specific techniques or explanatory models, it is the therapist’s allegiance to an approach that is important in successful psychotherapy. This occurs by the therapist providing the client with positive expectations, hope, and the opportunity to participate in developing healthy actions (Anderson et al., 2010; Hubble et al., 2010). The therapist and the client experience faith in the creditability and restoration of the approach and activities involved (Anderson et al., 2010). As such, it is understood that a therapeutic approach works best when therapists are able to engage and inspire clients (Hubble et al., 2010). The facilitators’ belief in nature in supporting wellbeing was recognised by some of the participants, who discussed this belief as inspiring and empowering, as well as sustaining the facilitators.

I think they both believe in what they do. They do it for a reason. I mean, I think with a job like that it's kind of got to be, because it's never that well paid or anything like that. You really got to believe in it. (Alex, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

This belief in nature connectedness was demonstrated by facilitators through encouraging participants to develop a reciprocal connection with nature by taking notice of their nature-based engagements; developing knowledge of the nature present; and encouraging respect and care for nature. I begin with the act of taking notice. Several facilitators discussed encouraging participants to step back from the nature-based activities and reflect on the impact of their nature-based engagement on themselves and the environment.

[S]ince I have started I've tried to encourage everyone to just take a step back and look at what they have done and enjoy, take it in, and I've especially with some of the younger volunteers [noticed] that now they might stop and just sit down and you can see them looking at the birds and looking at the trees, just enjoying the environment, whereas before they just spent two hours looking at the ground pulling out weeds. (Alasdair, Facilitator, Community Garden)

Taking notice of one's external and internal experiences is one of the Five Ways to Wellbeing (New Economics Foundation, 2008), a popular concept promoted by the NHS to support people's mental health (NHS, 2022). Taking notice is an aspect of mindfulness, which has been demonstrated to support wellbeing through people developing increased self-awareness and more constructive responses to their emotions and thoughts, as well as promoting feelings of happiness (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Huppert, 2009). Some facilitators discussed embracing nature as an actant in developing participants' self-awareness. For instance, Gary, a facilitator at ecotherapy interventions, discussed "*work[ing] in harmony with nature*" to support participants in their reflections on what they are "*learning from nature rather than just about it*". Meanwhile Colleen who participated at a community garden, where she is now the facilitator, discussed improving her emotional regulation through recognising that her emotions are fluid rather than fixed, with the growing of plants and changing of the seasons being symbolic of this process of change:

[D]ays where things are difficult it's a very important message to say that you know there are different seasons and you come through them ... definitely that's

a very strong thing about going out into nature because you can look and pay attention to what season it is and what different things [are] going on.

For participants, to be actively supported in taking notice in nature provides them with moments of calm and reflection (O'Brien, 2018), which can increase self-awareness, which is an aspect in making choices that align with a person's own values and supports long-term behavioural change (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; New Economics Foundation, 2008). Several research studies have also proposed a reciprocal relationship between mindfulness and nature connection, with each enhancing the other (Huynh and Torquati, 2019; Schutte and Malouff, 2018). Subsequently, the facilitators' intentions for participants to take notice of nature and reflect on how this affects them has the potential to set in motion long-term wellbeing practices (see Chapter 7).

Facilitators also encouraged participants to develop a nature connection by sharing with participants their knowledge of the species present, for example insects and plants. This was with the intention of increasing the participants' confidence, which enabled participants to change their own actions or share this knowledge with others.

[N]ot to become afraid of spiders or less afraid of being stung by bees or not to swipe at wasps, just these simple things. Telling them why, why would a bee sting you? ... Just showing them why all these things are important, it all comes back to knowledge and understanding a lot of time. Give them the opportunity to learn. (Stuart, Facilitator, Community Garden)

[T]he walks became something different, so it started off as an educational thing, but not in a preachy way, very much about giving people knowledge. So, that then they could go out and tell other people 'oh do you know about this'. So, it's empowering really isn't? It's about sharing that information to give them the confidence in these natural environments. (Anne, Facilitator, Gardening and Walking)

Facilitators also explained to participants the methods and products used at projects, which included the reasons, for example, for wild planting and using organic gardening products. Maund et al (2019) study of a wetlands intervention recognises that facilitators knowledge and enthusiasm supported participants' engagement and built their confidence to be in nature. Aspects of facilitators' personality, including their passion, willingness to share knowledge and explain the purpose of activities are reported as important factors in the successful facilitation of nature-based interventions (Juster-Horsfield and Bell, 2022; Maund et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2019) (For a critical discussion regarding affective interpersonal qualities see Chapter 6). This sharing of knowledge demonstrates the facilitators' intentions to influence participants' longer-term engagement with nature through providing a secure foundation for participants' continuing engagement (see Chapter 7).

Finally, whilst facilitators discussed how nature can provide a setting and components for activities that co-create unifying and beneficial experiences for participants, the facilitators also recognised nature as a collection of separate entities in their own right, which does not exist solely for the benefit of people. As such, facilitators viewed supporting participants to develop a life-long reciprocal relationship with nature was part of the delivery of nature-based interventions. Stuart, an educational gardener at a community garden, discussed how his personal intentions to provide environmental education to the public through educating participants about the human influence on the environment, including global and local food production, was part of the assemblage of aims of the garden:

[M]y agenda as an individual is to use this role to reach as many people as I can and teach about these environmental things, whilst getting everyone the education and the mental health benefits. So, it is very much a loop of all these different things and they all feedback into each other.

The creation of reciprocal nature connections was an aspect of several of the nature-based interventions. For example, Jason stated that one of his programme's aims is

that through engagement with nature participants will develop understanding of how nature can support their wellbeing, as well as develop pro-environmental behaviours.

[N]ot just purely about what I'm getting from nature to help me, but that reciprocal process as well. That kind of again I'm really feeling how nature is helping me and then we hope that people would want to go and help nature.
(Jason, Facilitator, Environmental Conservation and Ecotherapy)

The development of a reciprocal connection with nature can co-create benefits for both the participant and the natural environment through the enhancement of the participant's wellbeing and the development of pro-environmental behaviours (Liu et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2020). For young people participating in activities at nature-based interventions can influence their pro-environmental behaviours, support social interaction, and improve their connection to communities. This occurs through increased environmental awareness and development of social and personal norms which effect behavioural choices (Woodcock, 2017). For example, Daisy May, through her participation in marine-based environmental conservation projects, developed an identity as a conservationist, which provides her with purpose and belonging to people and nature. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Daisy May's reciprocal nature connection informed her decision to organise a litter pick at a local green space (figure 5.2). She held it on the day she would have completed a beach clean-up with the marine group she is part of. The litter pick provided Daisy May with connections to the marine group (through the sharing of data), the local community (meeting like-minded individuals) and nature (protecting the local area and stopping waste reaching the sea). The social connections strengthened Daisy May's connection with nature via a cyclical process involving her desire to protect nature, her enjoyment of being with nature, and her desire to meet and involve people in connecting with and looking after nature. As such, Daisy May's nature connection supports her in meeting her own challenges and needs, whilst also contributing affectively to meeting the needs and challenges of living interconnected with others and nature (Richardson, 2023; Totton, 2021).



Figure 5.2 *The local green space Daisy May organised a litter pick at (Photo: Daisy May)*

As I have demonstrated the facilitators' belief in nature connectedness enhances the activities and settings, making them a medium for education and empowerment, which can be transformational for participants' sense of self and practices (Crowther, 2019). As such, the facilitators' belief in nature connectedness contributes to the co-creation of a therapeutic landscape, where participants are supported in developing a relationship with nature, which can provide respite and insights at the time of participation and has the potential to support their becoming across their lifecourse. The participants encounter nature-based interventions situated within their lived experiences, which influences their motivation, participation, and becoming, which I critically explore in the next section.

5.3 Grounding participants' therapeutic experiences in their biography

Situating participants in their biography foregrounds the influence and meaning of relations, events, and memories in participants' encounters at nature-based interventions and the co-creation of affective experiences (Carlson et al., 2020; Muir and McGrath, 2018; Trangsrud et al., 2022). Studies considering participants' lived experiences have found these factors to inform the development of valuable and meaningful peer support, and provide insight into the uniqueness of participants' mental wellbeing (Cacciatore et al., 2020; Espeso, 2022; Muir and McGrath, 2018) (for a critical discussion regarding peer support see Chapter 6). Focusing on participants' situated biographies orientates us to consider the richness of participants' lives and the influence of their lived experiences on the co-creation of affective spaces and the effects of their participation on their becoming. As such, situating participants in their ongoing biography acts as a source of understanding the variation in effects from participants' nature-based intervention encounters.

I think it does have an impact where people have come from, what they've been through, what they see as the future. (Carol, Facilitator, Gardening Programme)

Carol, along with the other facilitators in their interviews, recognised that participants' life experiences shaped how participants approached nature-based interventions for their wellbeing. This recognition informed the facilitators' flexible approach to activities to support participants' different motivations and needs (see Chapter 6). The participants, through their life map and accompanying interview, also highlighted the role of their life history in contextualising their experience at the nature-based intervention. Figure 5.3 shows Mike's life map, which reflects common themes of all the participants' life maps, including their experiences of nature, mental wellbeing, home, school and work environments, and their long-term wellbeing practices and spaces. In the following sections, I will draw out the importance of situating participants' experiences at nature-based interventions in order to advance our understanding of participants as proactive co-creators of therapeutic landscape experiences which influences their becoming. To understand how participants shape

their participation and long-term wellbeing I will consider: the role of participants' motivations and intentions; the influence of the participants' childhood nature experiences; and participants' experience of nature-based interventions as alternative to their everyday.

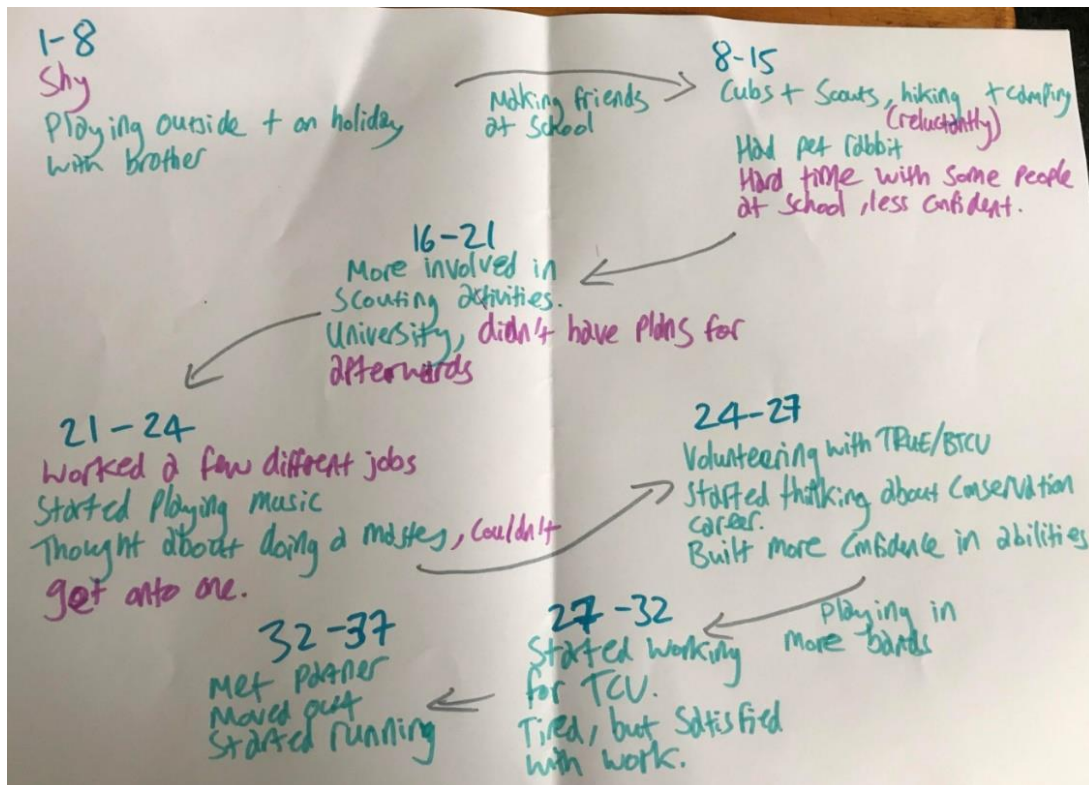


Figure 5.3 Mike's life map highlighting common themes of all participants' life maps

5.3.1 Recognising participants as agentic in co-creating therapeutic effects

A dominant theme from the participants' interviews was how their participation was underpinned by their intentions to proactively maintain and enhance their becoming. The participants' motivations to join and ongoing aims were often informed by their previous difficult situations and ineffective responses to them, as they wanted a fuller and healthier life.

It's something you want to achieve personally because you just don't want to go back to that state of mind. (Daisy May, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

Several facilitators also recognised the participants' agency in initiating and managing their process of change, whilst being supported by the group.

[T]he change comes from them. It's facilitated by the wider group. (Elaine, Facilitator, Environmental Conservation)

I can see that with lots of people, a lot of the time they're doing huge amounts of the emotional work themselves, but they're using the groups, they're using the gardening as an anchor, as a way of expanding, of giving them the confidence. (Anne, Facilitator, Gardening and Walking Groups)

The participants can be considered as an 'active self-healer', a term which recognises that clients are agentic in their efforts to co-create a therapeutic relationship which support their aims for engaging with therapy (Bohart and Tallman, 2010). The clients' proactivity is supported by their reflexivity and creativity in evaluating and adapting events and co-creating successful outcomes. As such the client is choosing the direction of their healing and growth, so that it aligns with their values and aims. I will demonstrate how participants' proactivity and reflexivity shape their encounters at nature-based interventions and their becoming.

I begin with Daniel, who was referred to an ecotherapy garden, for one year, by his GP to help with his 'depression' and 'anxiety' due to a major life event (for further details see Chapter 7). Whilst Daniel was referred, it was Daniel's choice to participate and one informed by his interests in the outdoors and preference for hands on learning via practical activities.

[T]hey said it was outdoors, gardening and that is all you need to say, and I went by, had a look around, loved the place and I was like 'yeah that's it, I'm sold'. (Daniel, Participant, Ecotherapy)

At the ecotherapy garden, Daniel described being proactive in choosing which activities to engage in depending on how he was feeling on that occasion, and his choices being

accepted and supported by the group. Through this reflectivity Daniel at times chose activities (e.g., tending vegetables) that offered him respite from his emotional distress, whilst on others created his own meaningful tasks (e.g., building storage for firewood), which provided him with a sense he was personally contributing to the garden and leaving his mark. Daniel's approach co-created a therapeutic experience which he enjoyed and where he was valued by his peers and the facilitators as a productive member at the garden, creating a sense of belonging (Bishop and Purcell, 2013). This affective environment dovetailed with Daniel's motivation, co-creating his sense of achievement and competence. In turn supporting Daniel's movement away from being overwhelmed by his distress and towards living more fully.

[I]t's almost like clearing a window that's covered in dust or crap ... so you can start to see through to the other side. (Daniel, Participant, Ecotherapy)

Daniel's experience of his intentions being supported by the facilitator(s) and peer group reflects a common theme expressed by participants (see Chapter 6 for further examples). It also echoes findings by Sachs (2022) that suggest supportive communities impact positively on participants' intrinsic motivation and continuing preservation with gardening.

Participants' belief that an intervention will meet their needs and has the potential to be transformative for them are strong motivating factors for that person to enrol (Husk et al., 2020; Popay et al., 2007). Several of the participants discussed trusting their instincts that participating would be beneficial to them.

I knew that [it] would be something that would be good for me. (Colleen, Participant, Community Garden)

The participants' belief in the intervention and hope for change also drives the co-creation of a therapeutic experience (Bohart and Tallman, 1999). For example, Colleen, decided to attend a community garden to proactively support and enhance her mental health as she believed being active outdoors with others and creating a structure for

her week would be beneficial for her. Colleen reflected on realising her pre-intervention response of withdrawal from the world due to being overwhelmed by 'anxiety' "*was no way to live, that I wasn't helping myself and it's been going on for so long*". By Colleen acting on her belief, she shifted her attention away from her difficult situation and engaged in a range of different experiences at the community garden, which were affective for her as they provided her with insights into her situation and her sense of self (Bohart and Tallman, 1999). As such, Colleen's belief in the value of the nature-based intervention supported her to move towards experiences that supported her personal growth and away from behaviours that were thwarting her actualising tendency.

Colleen's belief in the community garden was supported by her attuning to what she needed to support her process of becoming.

I do sometimes reflect and wonder what would of happened to me if I hadn't had that discipline to say 'ok you need to sort yourself out and you need to put your own mental health really [at] the heart of what you do'. (Colleen, Participant, Community Garden)

When a person realises their difficult situation is impeding their becoming, for example, affecting their sense of self, restricting their aims or disconnecting them from society then this realisation motivates them to 'self-right' (Bohart and Tallman, 1999), as demonstrated by Colleen's participation. However, for a person to trust their intuitions and engage with a nature-based intervention, especially if they have experienced unsupportive environments or distressing experiences, involves taking a risk, which requires courage and overcoming nerves. Steigen et al. (2022) recognise that participants' nerves are related to their social vulnerability and can impact on participants' attendance. Several participants discussed how their intention for long-term change supported them in overcoming their nerves and maintaining their participation.

[I]t was my opportunity to actually be who I truly am, and I must admit I was very scared at the beginning that someone would take that away from me, because of how I was when I wasn't well in my head like, being a full-on party girl. I was quite scared of that coming back, but I kind of control[led] that, so it was like a challenge in itself, but I did it obviously. (Daisy May, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

[T]here must've been a hell of a lot of nerves with that 'cause I don't do well going and suddenly doing something in a completely different place. So, it must have been a weird time to suddenly meet new people and do something that I've not really done before. (Mike, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

To overcome these nerves, Mike discussed a sense of needing to do it for himself, in order to create a direction, which had the potential to be more meaningful to him. Mike's intention was informed by his context of working in a job he had become stuck in and was not finding fulfilling. Mike's intention to 'self-right' was supported by the affective environment he encountered which supported his actualising tendency, enabling him to develop his self-confidence and learn new skills (Kogstad et al., 2014; Mearns and Thorne, 2007; O'Brien et al., 2011), moving Mike towards living more fully and joyfully (as shown on Mike's life map (figure 5.3)). A participants' perception that their wellbeing is improving is considered an important aspect in supporting a person's motivation and continuing attendance (Husk et al., 2020).

As I have demonstrated, the participants' intentions go beyond obtaining palliation for their everyday, but represent a desire to transform their sense of self and actions, which persist beyond the intervention. For example, both Colleen and Mike became facilitators of nature-based interventions, which provides them with a sense of fulfilment. Through the participants' active engagement at nature-based intentions they accumulate a range of experiences, which increases their awareness of their sense of self, how to support themselves, and respond to situations. These affective experiences improve the participants' trust in themselves by reconnecting them to their organismic valuing process and informing an internal locus of evaluation (Mearns

and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1959). When participants trust their judgements and actions this moves them towards reaching their potential (Rogers, 1961). As such, participants' long-term intentions and proactive engagement are aspects which co-create transformative therapeutic landscape experiences.

Finally, several facilitators commentated that there is an extremely low drop off rate, with personal factors (e.g., mental health, change of employment) being the main reason participants leave early.

[O]ver the last year there's maybe been five or six people that have come for a few days and then they don't come back. (Stuart, Facilitator, Community Garden)

[T]here are occasions where people's mental health has declined and then they've left ... I don't think there's a huge amount ... but there have been instances where some people have got jobs. (Mhairi, Facilitator, Environmental Conservation and Ecotherapy)

The facilitators' anecdotal comments compare very favourably to psychotherapy where 20% of clients withdraw early (Swift and Greenberg, 2012). As noted above, participants' perception of change maintains participation, as do the facilitator's ability to develop empathic and trusting relationships (see Chapter 6), which build participants' confidence (Husk et al., 2020). An additional factor which supports participation is by reducing the fear of the unknown for participants, for example by providing information, having in-depth conversations, or accompanying participants to the first session (Bragg and Leck, 2017). Another way participants' fear of the unknown may be reduced is through the participants' nature connection, which I explore next.

5.3.2 Planting seeds: Childhood nature connections

All the participants described beneficial encounters with nature when a child through engaging with nature as a space for enjoying activities and for spending time with

significant others, as well as for being alone, where nature was perceived as providing a safe haven. I begin by considering the influence of the activities and significant others on participants' nature connection and later engagements with nature-based interventions. Participants engaged with a range of activities including playing outside with friends; cycling and/or walking with friends or family; being in the garden and for some doing gardening activities; and adventure-based, including hiking, canoeing, cycling when on holiday or through school or organised group trips. The activities tended to take place in the participants' everyday nature, local to their family or grandparents' home. Parents and grandparents were noted by participants as having an influence on their engagement with the outdoors, with grandparents particularly important for connecting participants to gardens and gardening activities.

[I]t would have been my dad, he loved being outdoors and loved nature and in fact he'd always tell us not to pick flowers and he had a real thing about people leaving litter and things, but he would take us, I remember walks in the [name of forest] or local walks and so I think that's where it would have started. (Gill, Participant, Green and Blue Exercise)

[M]y introduction into the outdoors is really from my granny ... every holiday we went to stay with them, often going camping or away in the caravan ... she had a huge garden, which had its own orchard in it ... we'd help and pick the fruit and then make the crumble or the pie with her in the kitchen afterwards. (Alex B, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

The participants' childhood encounters influence the development of a formative connection with nature (Cheng and Monroe, 2012; Rosa et al., 2018). A significant influence on children's nature connection is the parents/guardian nature connection (Barrable and Booth, 2020; Passmore et al., 2021), especially when adults play with their children and allow their children free play either on own or with friends (Chawla, 2007; Wu et al., 2023). Through this nature-based play joyful experiences are created, as well as values and knowledge of nature passed on (Chawla, 2007). These childhood nature experiences also influence people's familiarity with nature and confidence to

engage with nature later in life, and their perspective of the physical and emotional benefits of being active in green spaces (Ward Thompson et al., 2008).

Participants viewed their established relationship with nature as influencing their participation at nature-based interventions, through their awareness of enjoying and benefiting from being active in nature.

I think it' just stayed with me through and through because I used to love it as a child and guess I wanted to relive that, and I did but on my own terms. (Daisy May, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

I obviously enjoyed it as a child, and it's stayed with me and then he [dad] introduced me to backpacking and then everything I've done is linked with the next part of the journey as it were and the interconnectedness of all the activities over the years. (Gill, Participant, Green and Blue Exercise)

[M]y parents were keen walkers, so it was something I was sort of always brought up with, so it was just [a] natural extension of those things. (Jilly, Participant, Green Exercise)

The participants' relationship with nature facilitated their engagement with a nature-based intervention when seeking to maintain or enhance their becoming. For example, Jilly discussed in her interview that her "early groundings" of family walks supported her engagement with a walking group, when she was looking to connect to others through an activity she enjoys, to support her socially. The participants' experience echoes research which proposes childhood nature experiences motivates and open people to new and regular outdoor experiences due to the perception nature is a beneficial place to engage with (Asah et al., 2012; Ward Thompson et al., 2008).

The second aspect of participants' childhood nature encounters was that for several participants it provided an escape from unhealthy home environments. These participants recalled nature as an affective actant in providing a source of respite,

through encountering a setting where the participants could be themselves, away from judgements, or to spend time processing their relationships and experiences.

I think the only thing that saved me is that I had the escape of the garden and the countryside, so I think that is why I cope[d] so well. (Michael, Participant, Adventure and Environmental Conservation)

I think growing up, nature and being outside offered me an escape from somewhere I didn't really want to be [home]. (Alex B, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

I think it's partially the horizon, like that distance, like having space. I didn't really have that as a kid, I didn't have space. We were always on top of each other even though we lived in a big enough house that we weren't on top of each other. I think the beach was really the only time that I felt like I had proper space. (Jaanki, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

During these situations the participants experienced nature as a third place, which offered emotional retreat from their everyday places of home or school, which were experienced as being restricting (Biglin, 2021). For example, for Jaanki being at the beach with her family was not as confining as being at home, as her sense of space provided her with emotional, if not physical, distance from her family relationships and time to process the effects of those relationships on her. Subsequently, with nature the participants had different embodied experiences, which co-created a therapeutic encounter (Biglin, 2021). These experiences informed participants of the value of their nature connection in supporting their emotional processing and regulation (Richardson, 2019; Richardson and McEwan, 2018). Subsequently, it is possible that the participants' nature connection informs their belief that participating at a nature-based intervention will support and enhance their mental wellbeing.

As I have demonstrated, situating participants in their biography informs a nuance understanding of their engagements with nature-based interventions. The participants'

childhood nature encounters inform a nature connection, which is a strong contributing factor for why participants chose nature as an actant in their process of becoming. For several participants relating to nature as a third place during their childhood, formed a therapeutic landscape, which provided opportunities for respite from their everyday and emotional processing. In the final section I continue to explore the concept of third places, when considering nature-based interventions as places of inclusion.

5.3.3 Co-creating belonging: Countering marginalization

Participants perceived that their encounters at nature-based interventions occurred in an alternative environment due to the affective interpersonal qualities present, especially those participants who had difficulties in their everyday environments. The majority of participants discussed experiences of being marginalized at home or school, which were framed as them having differences in interest, values or experiences which did not fit with the majority perspective, rather than specifically occurring due to their age. As such, participants experienced nature-based interventions as third places, which provided an informal, caring, and inclusive space for emotional refuge and non-demanding social interactions (Biglin, 2021; Fly and Boucquey, 2023). By situating participants' experiences of home and school in their biography I will demonstrate why participants value nature-based interventions as a third place.

I begin by discussing the participants' home life, where I focus on participants who reported difficult experiences, which adversely impacted their self-worth, self-confidence and created a sense of being alienated at home.

[T]hat's one thing that I struggle with, my mum and the way she speaks about me or to me, 'cause that's where the lack of confidence and self-worth has come from. It stems from my mum. (Daisy May, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

[Y]oung teenager, and my parents they never discussed anything with me, and they just used to scream and shout at me, hit me. So, when I was bullied at school if I came home and I [had] confronted the bullies and stood up to them, one of them might have hit me, and then my parents would find out about it and then they would have beaten me, saying you are causing trouble. So, I just let them bully me. So, that was a real bad time. (Michael, Participant, Adventure and Environmental Conservation)

It wasn't a good environment to be brought up in and be nurtured. (Alex B, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

Several participants experienced parental relationships which were detrimental to their sense of self and thwarted their actualising tendency. Through participating at a nature-based intervention, they had opportunities to experience relationships where they were met with care, acceptance, and an interest in who they are and what they wanted from their participation. For example, Alex B experienced a controlling environment at home, where they did not have privacy and their gender was used to define the activities they could engage in. Alex B reflecting on their participation at an environmental conservation project, noted they experienced a sense of freedom, which was *“a complete revelation really, it was just like oh my goodness like this is possible, like I don't have to feel completely trapped all the time”*. For Alex B, the environmental conservation project was a third place as it provided her with a safe space, where a diverse range of people accepted them as they are, which Alex B experienced as liberating and (re)connected them to their sense of self (Biglin, 2021; Parry and Glover, 2010). For young people, third places are valuable as they provide non-judgemental, open, and flexible relationships, which co-create affective spaces that firstly, supports young people’s engagement with a diverse range of people, and secondly, their wellbeing through the development of a sense of freedom, fun and belonging (de St Croix and Doherty, 2023). Alex B has since developed supportive relationships to help her maintain and enhance her wellbeing, recognising that affective relationships reduce her barriers to getting outside when depressed or anxious (Gittins et al., 2023).

[T]he happiest place is when I'm in nature with my friends because they're kind of like the family that I made myself, all of my friends are people I feel safe and comfortable with. (Alex B, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

For several participants, school was a second environment that caused them emotional distress (e.g., low confidence, low mood, high 'anxiety') through being bullied and isolated.

I was nine years old in a new school and I was alone, that must have been in my mum's school [she worked there]. Alone a very long time, no friends. Skip forward a few years, eleven years old, now I'm at secondary school and I find it very difficult, completely alone, hated it. (Daniel, Participant, Ecotherapy)

I went from being bullied like all the time, like being chased around the playground. I couldn't get people to leave me alone till they all got bored and then they forgot I existed, which was preferable, but also in itself quite sad 'cause you know I was completely isolated. (ES, Participant, Community Garden)

For ES it was not until she attended a community garden that she experienced being accepted as she is. This acceptance from her fellow participants and the facilitator co-created a sense of belonging, which provided ES with an anchor, where she could develop trust in herself, through matching how she was feeling on each occasion with the activities on offer. ES's encounters in this safe space improved her confidence and supported her in accepting her dyspraxia and how it limits her movements and capabilities. At the community garden ES's autonomy was supported through the accepting community present (Harris, 2017; Veen et al., 2021), compared to in school, where her self-expression was thwarted and her personal power overwhelmed through being bullied by her peers (Rogers, 1978).

The affective third places co-created at nature-based interventions reflect the qualities of youth work spaces that provide open, informal, and relational spaces for young

people to explore their being and belonging (de St Croix and Doherty, 2023). The facilitators' care and intentions towards the participants offer them alternative experiences of being related to, which accept rather than reject them for who they are (Mearns and Cooper, 2018). Within this safe space participants are able to try new activities and connect to a diverse range of people without fear of judgement. Through this the participants develop awareness of which activities and types of interactions support their growth, reconnecting them to their organismic valuing process and an internal locus of evaluation (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1961). The impact of this reconnection will be explored in Chapter 7 where I consider the long-term impacts of participating at a nature-based intervention.

5.4 Conclusion

I have demonstrated the presence of two common factors amongst facilitators: their care-informed approach and their belief in nature connectedness. These two factors inform the facilitators' delivery of activities, enhancing them from opportunities for meaningful occupation and respite, to being a medium for transformation. This occurs through the facilitators' caring intentions towards participants in supporting them to develop long-term engagements with healthy habits and practices. This includes the promotion of a reciprocal connection to nature, which supports participants' emotional regulation and processing, development of purpose, and belonging. As such, the presence of these two common factors co-creates therapeutic landscape experiences which enable transformative experiences.

To understand transformative landscape experiences, we also need to understand that the participants of nature-based interventions have varied and complex lived experiences which influence their participation. The participants perceive their participation will be of benefit to them and involve more than palliation, as they are guided by long-term intentions to transform their sense of self, actions, and life circumstances. The participants' engagement is also informed by their childhood nature encounters, which they found beneficial at the time. This formative connection to nature supports participants' belief in nature as being an affective actant in

supporting their wellbeing. For several participants, their participation enhances their nature connection, which provides them with belonging and a sense of purpose. As such, through recognising the importance of participants' biography in shaping their encounters I situate participants as agentic in their own therapeutic outcomes.

Finally, participants experience nature-based interventions as third places, where their self-expression is accepted and supported, due to the affective relationships they encounter. For participants who experienced difficulties in their everyday environments the opportunity to experience caring and supportive relationships was a significant influence on their sense of self. As the participants encountered an affective community, which supported their engagement with activities in reflective, creative, and proactive ways, which supported the participants to realise their intentions and venture beyond the constraints they had experienced. Subsequently, third places have the potential to offer participants more than an affective sanctuary from everyday difficulties, rather the opportunity to be supported in making the changes they desire in their lives. In the next empirical chapter, I consider how particular personal qualities are involved in the co-creation of affective environments.

Chapter 6 Intervening: The co-creation of affective interpersonal relationships

6.1 Introduction

In this second empirical chapter, I critically discuss the personal qualities involved in affective interpersonal relationships at nature-based interventions and the effect of these relations on participants' wellbeing. The interpersonal qualities I am considering are non-judgemental acceptance, empathic understanding, genuineness, and trust. I will consider these relational influences at the time of participants' engagement with the nature-based interventions and the longevity of these affects across the participants' lifecourse. I propose that these interpersonal qualities co-create therapeutic encounters, which have the potential to be transformative for participants. This transformative experience involves a relational process which respects participants' autonomy and enables intrapersonal qualities that develop the participants' trust in themselves, leading to improved self-confidence and authentic self-expression. These supportive relationships experienced by participants also provide a guide for future affective relational environments, which support participants' sense of self and their maintenance and enhancement of their long-term wellbeing.

At nature-based interventions, participants' encounters are mediated through the facilitators and fellow group members, which have the potential to influence participants' experiences and wellbeing. However, as I noted in Chapter 5, whilst researchers have recognised the role of social interaction as an affective characteristic of nature-based interventions, the specific personal qualities that co-create affective social interactions have been given less attention. Meanwhile, Fernee et al. (2021) propose a psychosocial process that enables personal insights, awareness and acceptance is involved in supporting changes to participants' sense of self. This relates to Conradson's (2005) proposal that therapeutic landscape experiences occur due to the interactions between a person and the characteristics of a place, including the other people involved. To understand this relational process of transformational

change I draw on Carl Rogers' (1951; 1957) conceptualisations of the person and the therapeutic relationship (see Chapter 3). Rogers (1957) proposed therapeutic relationships which are experienced by the client as authentic, empathic, and non-judgemental co-create a safe space for a client to explore their situation and develop trust in their own feelings and thoughts, which reduces their emotional distress and supports their process of actualisation (Mearns and Cooper, 2018; Rogers, 1957; Rogers, 1961). In describing affective third places, researchers have recognised the involvement of empathic, non-judgemental, and understanding ways of relating (Glover and Parry, 2009; Parry and Glover, 2010). These relationships inform the formation of safe spaces for peer support, as well as with particular members of staff, which provides people with emotional retreat and deep reflection. Through considering the qualities that co-create affective interpersonal environments I draw attention to a person-centred psychosocial process that enriches our understanding of how participants' encounters at nature-based interventions influence their becoming at the time of participation and over their lifecourse.

I begin by exploring the facilitators' embodiment and expression of non-judgemental acceptance, empathic understanding, and genuineness. I follow by discussing the co-creation of person-centred encounters through the fostering of trust between facilitators and participants. Next, I consider the benefits to participants' becoming from being trusted by facilitators. Finally, I discuss the role of peer relationships in contributing to the affective space and participants' short and long-term wellbeing. Throughout this critical discussion I demonstrate the involvement of specific interpersonal qualities in facilitating an environment for change; and that a person is agentic in perceiving and engaging with these affective relations in co-creating therapeutic encounters. As such, I establish that the facilitators and participants at nature-based interventions co-create the changes desired by participants through the formation of affective relationships.

6.2 Facilitators as (in)visible components of nature-based interventions

Within the geographical literature, researchers have recognised the importance of affective spaces, where people experience warm and supportive interactions that support people being understood and their unique expressions (Glover and Parry, 2009; Parr, 1997; Warner et al., 2013). There are also a few studies focused on nature-based interventions, where the facilitator is recognised as component in supporting participants' participation and wellbeing (Harper, 2009; Juster-Horsfield and Bell, 2022; Murray et al., 2019). However, researchers have not explored why these personal qualities are integral to the formation of safe spaces that contribute to participants' wellbeing. The qualities which make the psychotherapist one of the four common factors of successful psychotherapy are also recognised as being among the personal qualities of successful group facilitators (Hubble et al., 2010; Yalom and Leszcz, 2005). It is the significance of these characteristics in forming affective environments that I explore in this section. Whilst in practice, these personal qualities of genuineness, non-judgemental acceptance, and empathic understanding work together, I will look at them separately to highlight the specifics and value of each quality.

6.2.1 Relational quality: Non-judgemental acceptance

A dominant theme from my analysis was the importance of facilitators' non-judgemental acceptance of participants.

[T]hey were definitely very accepting with what I'd like to do. (Daniel, Participant, Ecotherapy)

Acceptance of the various ways participants engaged with the activities was recognised by the facilitators and participants as being important in creating unpressurised spaces. In these spaces participants were not criticised, but rather offered guidance, praise, or encouragement to take ownership of a certain activity or space. Colleen, who now facilitates at the community garden she participated at, has taken on the ethos of the facilitator who worked with her regarding the garden being a supportive learning

space. Hemingway et al. (2016) propose care farms support personal growth via providing a non-judgemental, flexible, and supportive learning space, where participants are free to explore different activities and spaces in ways they choose. This approach supports participants' autonomy and reinforce they are being accepted as they are.

[W]e don't criticise when our volunteers do something, we give guidance on how to do something, but I said before we are a community garden, nothing is perfect. If people come in and have their own ideas about the way something should look or what they want to do, I'm just like, 'yes, crack on'. It's great that people have a sense of ownership and they're allowed to do what they think is best. So, no criticism, lots of encouragement. (Colleen, Participant, Community Garden)

ES joined a community garden to support her mental health, which was impacted due to being bullied and not knowing “*why I was so slow*”, which left her feeling stupid. She was later diagnosed with dyspraxia, which helped her to understand and accept her situation. During this period of uncertainty, she found the accepting and unpressurised space nourishing, enabling her to experience herself differently as this affective environment muted her self-critic. This contrasted with her time at school, where she felt frustrated as on bad days she had to “*power through*” the scheduled lessons.

I could turn up and do as little or as much as I wanted, and both were fine. I didn't have to deal with any of the thoughts, I didn't have to think 'if I don't dig this like correctly or like enough of it, I'm going to fail at life'. (ES, Participant, Community Garden)

Colleen and ES's representative experiences echo findings by Murray et al. (2019) which recognised that the offering of a non-judgemental environment supported participants at a care farm to relax and open up, providing space to focus on their personal development. An accepting environment supports participants to develop trust in themselves, which enables them to explore and challenge themselves within a

safe environment (Mearns and Cooper, 2018; Mearns and Thorne, 2007). For people to be able to make decisions without consequences is an important aspect in the formation of therapeutic environments, which in-turn provides respite from difficult situations, supporting their mental health and stopping emotional difficulties from escalating (Brewster, 2014). Further, through participants' engagement with activities and peers at nature-based interventions they can develop insight and self-confidence, which supports them to accept themselves as they are, rather than live up to external expectations (Elings and Hassink, 2008; Fernee et al., 2021). Through the participants accepting themselves this supports a reconnection to their organismic valuing process and movement towards an internal locus of evaluation (Mearns and Thorne, 2007). This can have longer-term impacts through participants developing trust in their own judgements, which supports flexible decision making and guides them towards nourishing experiences that support their flourishing (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1961).

Facilitators also recognised, that for some participants, attending the nature-based intervention was a rare occasion in their week when they could enjoy being unaccompanied within the space of the intervention. For example, participants could spend time away from careers or family members, with the facilitator supporting the participants to undertake activities independently. For these participants to be accepted and trusted to participate on their own terms was experienced as freeing. The participants appreciated that their movements were not scrutinised and enjoyed the freedom to take breaks when they wanted, which contributed to their enjoyment of the nature-based intervention.

[H]e had gotten so much out of being able to come on his own, sneak off and read the newspaper, have a cigarette. It's like ok and then he'd come back and do some more work. So, it's very much again on his terms and it worked.

(Elaine, Facilitator, Environmental Conservation)

To have choices affirmed, even when they appear counter-therapeutic (e.g., smoking), is enabling and valued by participants, contributing to their sense of a therapeutic

space; a space, in which they can assert their identity, away from social surveillance (Wood et al., 2013). This respect towards participants' choices is also reflected in how facilitators approached some participants' irregular attendance. Facilitators recognised that many participants are firstly, choosing to attend to help improve their wellbeing and that attendance is voluntary. Secondly, facilitators also recognised that participants' situations may mean participants have difficulties attending regularly or arriving on time at the start of a session. The facilitators accept participants may be experiencing emotionally difficult situations, which may affect their sleep, memory, and motivation. When those who have been absent return, they are offered the opportunity to talk about their attendance and/or the factors affecting it, but the focus remains on engagement in the session in-hand.

I think if people are in a situation at home where they're very very stressed it is easy to miss that one appointment or come next week, and then they've forgotten that they didn't go last week ... I do try and talk to them, but I try and move forward as well. (Carol, Facilitator, Community Allotment)

For participants to experience not being told what to do, but instead have the effects of their circumstances validated, provides participants with a sense of control over their attendance, which can support them to move towards valuing themselves and developing an openness to experience (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1961). For young people, they value not being judged, but accepted 'as they are' by adults at interventions, promoting a sense of being respected (Matos et al., 2023). This acceptance from adults supports young people to feel they are being listened to and ensures the guidance received is experienced as encouraging and not limiting, which enhances their sense of self. This can contrast to young people's experience of mainstream schools where they can experience not being recognised as an individual and having to conform to external judgements (Mills and McGregor, 2013). Consequently, relationships with adults in which young people are respected can firstly, provide a template for functional relationships with adults and peers, and secondly, influence the direction of young people's lives. For example, the young people stopped engaging in a circle of conflict and unhelpful behaviours at school, which limited their

educational and work opportunities, and developed self-efficacy and confidence in who they are, which enabled them to engage with beneficial opportunities (e.g., apprenticeships, voluntary) (Matos et al., 2023).

As I have demonstrated the facilitators' attitude of non-judgemental acceptance, characterised by care, openness, and trust towards the participants, contributes to affective relationships, which facilitate the participants' development of insight and awareness that supports participants to accept, value and trust themselves. Through this process participants experience short-term respite from their emotional distress, as well as transformative experiences due to reconnecting to their organismic valuing process and developing an internal locus of evaluation. This transformative process is also influenced by the facilitators empathic understanding and genuineness, which I explore in the next two sections.

6.2.2 Relational quality: Empathic understanding

The second interconnecting personal quality is the facilitators' desire to understand the participants and support their preferred way(s) of engaging with the activities on offer. For example, Sue, a social and therapeutic horticulturalist, discussed an allotment scheme, where colleagues experienced difficulties in understanding a participant's form of communication. Sue discussed spending time with the participant, attempting to experience his world through observing and listening. From this Sue recognised he had:

A sophisticated understanding of how to manage the allotment, it was all food growing. So, he actually understood quite a bit and knew how to use quite a range of different tools and machines.

Due to Sue's desire to understand him, she learnt what it was like for him to participate and recognised his abilities and knowledge. This she noted was affirming for him and respectful of his expertise. When a person experiences empathy they develop a sense of being known and understood, which improves their self-worth (Mearns and Thorne,

2007; Rogers, 2007). Recognising participants as capable and knowledgeable, and in turn, giving them responsibility for meaningful tasks, builds participants' confidence and promotes their autonomy, which contributes to positive mental wellbeing (Rotheram et al., 2017).

The facilitators empathy is a component of their care-informed approach, with several facilitators discussing being available to chat to participants about the participants' experiences at the nature-based intervention, as well as matters in other areas of the participants' lives. The facilitators recognised the importance of listening with care and understanding to participants and their situations, but they were also aware that they are not psychotherapists and the limits to what they can safely explore with a participant. This resonates with findings by Juster-Horsfield and Bell (2022) regarding facilitators' awareness of the limits to their own skillsets in terms of providing and managing a safe environment for participants' and the promotion of their wellbeing.

We will often sit and have a cup of water or something and talk with them and they sometimes do open up ... I might be the only person asking them that in their lives ... but you know this is our approach, is what we do, very gentle, very friendly, no pressure, we're not here to put people under pressure in any way ... we don't counsel them ... but they do seem to trust us because they know we're not going to jump up and down. (Carol, Facilitator, Community Allotment)

Several participants appreciated the facilitators taking an interest in their lives beyond the nature-based interventions. These included facilitators taking a calm understanding approach to participants' current situations, concerns, or encouraging them to try new activities to develop their skills for possible future careers. These enquiries from facilitators were experienced by participants as being friendly, with several participants noting facilitators as being valuable people to chat to about a range of topics, including their feelings, how their day is going or small talk. The facilitators consistent empathic communication creates a sense of security for participants through providing someone reliable to talk to about everyday and difficult situations (Mearns and Thorne, 2007).

[A] bit of everything really, so talked about how I'm feeling, my day and what not, have a social chat, just talk about anything really. (Daniel, Participant, Ecotherapy)

[W]hen I was panicking and [facilitator] kind of understood that I just needed to sit and talk about it in a way that made sense to me, and then I felt a lot better than I would have otherwise. (Emma, Participant, City Farm)

Participants valued being understood by the facilitator and experienced these types of conversations as caring and compassionate. These conversations supported the participants' understanding of themselves, their agency, and the development of alternative perspectives (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1980). As being met with empathy overtime facilitates participants' self-awareness and connection to their self-healing capacities, especially when these have been thwarted through the development of self-protective measures (e.g., social withdrawal) in response to detrimental environments (Bohart and Tallman, 1999; Mearns and Thorne, 2007). Participants noted that these caring spaces supported a sense of belonging to a community and the opportunity to engage in positive social interactions that supported their wellbeing (English et al., 2008). This sense of belonging occurs as the participants experience being understood by the facilitator, which counters their sense of alienation, for example, at home or school (Freire, 2007). The participants' experiences resonate with Conradson's (2003) account of the importance of empathic understanding as a significant factor in creating caring spaces by affirming people's choices, assisting self-development, and providing a source of care in the moment.

Finally, by a facilitator attuning to the individual person, empathic understanding helps to co-create specific pathways for different participants, differentiating individual participants' needs and desires. Firstly, for some participants, this involved supporting them with their long-term sense of being and belonging. Facilitators recognised that nature-based interventions provide unique safe spaces, which for some participants become a significant aspect of their lives. For example, Alasdair, a community garden facilitator, discussed how at a previous gardening project for mental health, supporting

participants to stay long-term was beneficial to their wellbeing, as he recognised that asking them to move on would be distressing because they did not have access to other suitable spaces. As, at the nature-based intervention, those participants had developed a sense of belonging, where their participation was valued, providing their life with purpose and friendships (Bishop and Purcell, 2013; Howarth et al., 2021).

I was always of the opinion if someone reaches a certain age what else are they going to do, and it is gonna be more traumatic to just not have this place anymore.

However, Alasdair also recognised that for some participants moving on and joining another project would help broaden that participant's horizons. As such, Alasdair would challenge their attachment to the place, by gently inviting them to a conversation about their volunteering and introduce how that participant can build on their experience, which can be fulfilling and contribute to that person's flourishing.

[I]f I do feel [for] someone else it's becoming too much of a focus for them I'll actually say to them I think it would be a really good idea to try to volunteer in other places. I think it would be a really good idea if you find some other things you're interested in like this. 'Cause then it opens their mind up a little bit to the world.

The facilitators' empathic approach plays a role in engaging participants in a dynamic relational venture, where the presence of empathy affirms to the participant that they and their concern(s) are valued (Rud, 2003). This supports participants in seeking a resolution to their concern(s), as the facilitators' empathic non-judgemental engagement, expressed through enquiries, understanding, and responses, supports participants to explore what might help them (Bohart, 2004; Rud, 2003). This enables participants to develop alternative perspectives, which supports unlearning unhelpful behaviours, developing new meanings, and re-connecting to their self-trust, which enables them to put these new insights into practice and engage with beneficial communities. The presence of empathy in therapeutic encounters is important at all

ages, but for young people, whose voice may not always be heard due to their lives being mediated by other people (Skelton and Valentine, 1998), relationships with adults which recognise and value them can offer transformational experiences (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Johns et al., 2017). These relationships with an empathic adult can support the young person in negotiating transitions, understanding their developing self, and negotiating their interdependencies as they move towards autonomy.

6.2.3 Relational quality: Genuineness

Finally, being genuine or authentic was considered important by several facilitators as this openly communicated their care for the participants and interest in their wellbeing. Firstly, facilitators expressed that being authentic in their presentation and actions shaped the social norms, in terms of ways of doing and being at the nature-based interventions. Here, facilitators noted that participants perceive facilitators' behaviours as a reflection of the facilitators' attitudes towards them.

People connect with who we are because we are authentic. We operate in the way that we are asking them to operate and what we are doing, we are modelling the behaviours, the dialogue, the language, and that then is reflected back ... I mean it's really interesting we had very little challenge to the way we do our work. (Gary, Facilitator, Ecotherapy)

Through facilitators being genuine in their engagements with the participants they meet the participants as equals and do not separate themselves from the group behind the façade of a role (Mearns and Cooper, 2018). This supports the development of safe spaces as the facilitators are not interested in manipulating the participants to participate in particular ways, but are focused on the participants experience (Mearns and Thorne, 2007). This is also highlighted by facilitators approaching their engagement with participants with honesty. This included responding to the diverse ways participants approached the activities on offer and receiving feedback from the participants. For example, Elaine noted that some participants may choose to engage

with an activity in their own unique way or maybe struggle with an activity. Elaine explained that the participants were never criticised for how they choose to do something, but that she would offer guidance to the participant to support completing the task, alongside sincere praise as the participant tested out her guidance. The roles of compassion and personal attention is recognised as contributing to building self-confidence in participants at social prescribing activities (Husk et al., 2020)

Praise isn't used as a tool, but because it is meant, heartfelt and in response to the participants engagement and progress. (Elaine, Facilitator, Green Gym Chair)

Clive, meanwhile, discussed the importance of being genuinely open to receiving feedback from participants as he viewed it as part of building a trusting relationship with the participants, which is an important component of co-creating a safe environment that in-turn recognises the participants' agency and can help participants' engagement (Knox and Cooper, 2015).

[W]e're all there to learn and so I give them feedback, they give me feedback, which is nice, and then hopefully I can build a relationship with the volunteers, they trust me, I trust them, they feel relaxed when they're engaging with me. (Clive, Facilitator, Environmental Conservation)

Secondly, the facilitators regarded being genuine as an important factor in developing trust, which was deemed essential if the participants were to engage with the activities.

Gaining the trust is the first thing. If they trust you and what you're doing it allows more to come through and it's around openness and honesty (Gary, Facilitator, Ecotherapy)

This reflects findings from other nature-based intervention studies that suggest fostering trust is an aspect of creating safe environments, which facilitate participants

to challenge their perception of their self but are also accepting of participants taking a step back (Gibbs et al., 2022; Kogstad et al., 2014). This encourages participants to decide for themselves based on their experience what is most appropriate for them in that moment, which supports the participants in developing trust in their organismic valuing process and their internal valuations.

Thirdly, facilitators discussed a genuine affection for participants embedded in illustrations of care. For example, Jason, reflected on his interest in the long-term sustainability of participants' wellbeing. As such, when Jason shares meditation practices with the participants, he is honest about the challenges he finds in following traditional approaches to meditation and shares the variations he has adopted.

I am always very honest to people in the group. I will lead the grounding, but it's not something I do a lot, but what I do is when I'm walking or if I'm sitting, I will stop and I will try and just listen. I might not sit and do ten minutes of mindfulness, I say that's not for me, but I do this. And we offer a mindful walk as well, and I might sit and take some breaths and listen and feel the tree, that's what I do. I think people really will pick up on your authenticity, people do, don't they? (Jason, Facilitator, Environmental Conservation and Ecotherapy)

Through being congruent, Jason is demystifying the activity for the participants, as well as affirming the potential for adapting processes to meet individual needs. This encourages participants to develop long-term practices based on their internal evaluations of what works for them, as well as to trust themselves to be flexible and act in ways which feel right to them, rather than deferring to external opinions (Cornelius-White, 2007; Rogers, 1963).

As noted, facilitators' genuineness helps to develop trust with the participants, as by facilitators being congruent in their actions and communications, they are being transparent as they show their thinking behind their engagements and acknowledge that they are still learning and growing (Mearns and Thorne, 2007). Facilitators' congruence also expresses to the participants, firstly, the participants can choose how

they engage and secondly, that they are not interested in manipulating the participants to conform. These actions affirm to participants that to be yourself is enough, which supports participants to reconnect to their organismic valuing process to guide their decisions, which can be transformational as participants develop self-worth, which supports their becoming (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1963).

6.3 Participant-centred encounters

Through the facilitators' non-judgemental acceptance, empathic understanding, and genuineness they create a presence, which communicates to the participants that they are valued, understood, and trusted to participate and express themselves in ways which support their intentions. Through this presence the facilitators also demonstrate they are a safe, trustworthy, and consistent person. The participants' perception of this presence indicates to them that the facilitator is someone who is not going to criticise or set prescribed ways of doing, but work as an equal partner in exploring with them what is meaningful to them (Bettmann et al., 2021; Mearns and Cooper, 2018). This co-creates a therapeutic environment which supports the participants' tendency towards growth and reconnection to their organismic valuing process (Mearns and Thorne, 2007). As such, affective interpersonal relationships at nature-based interventions can provide a transformative experience firstly, by supporting participants' tendency to actualise, and secondly, by facilitating participants' to match their experiencing of their self and the moment with their actions, which promotes trust in their internal evaluations (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1961). This process reduces a person's emotional distress as they develop self-worth, self-confidence, value their sense of self, and develop belonging, which supports their becoming across the lifecourse (see Chapter 7 for examples). An aspect of this transformative process is the facilitators' willingness to engage with participants' intentions and interests to develop with them personalised nourishing activities and interactions (Howarth et al., 2021). A significant aspect of this process is the development of trust between the facilitator and participant, which I consider next and follow by demonstrating the effects of being trusted on participants' becoming.

6.3.1 Fostering trust with participants

The cultivation of trust at nature-based interventions between facilitators and participants is recognised as a key component in creating environments which support participants to engage and challenge themselves (McIver et al., 2018; Ward et al., 2022). As I have discussed above the facilitators' genuineness, in combination with empathy and non-judgemental acceptance, is a factor in fostering trust and creating a safe environment. Another aspect was the facilitators' flexible approach to participants' engagement with the activities on offer. The participants articulated a range of motivations for participating at nature-based interventions, for example, to support their social and mental wellbeing, to gain experience for study or work, and/or to enhance their experience of life. As such, facilitators stated a significant aspect of their role was to facilitate the participants' individual intentions. This involved firstly, the facilitators' careful exploration with individual participants to understand their intentions and interests, which occurred by facilitators being attentive to participants interactions as well as through discussion with participants.

[W]e've got a real mix of people, so you have to try and work out which thing would be best for that individual or what they're interested in or how they could progress through. (Anne, Facilitator, Gardening and Walking Groups)

[I]t is building trust and it's making somebody feel safe, so they feel safe with you as a person, that is not going to be criticising them or telling them what to do or any of that really. So, it is working with somebody [in a] relationship and it is choice finding and you are finding the links as well. (Jane, Facilitator, Social and Therapeutic Horticultural)

Secondly, facilitators also provided a choice of activities, which invited participants to explore their interests and attune to activities they found enjoyable.

I like to use my expertise to help the participants to make what they want, to try and devise something that they're going to find meaningful to themselves, and

choose plants that they like. (Sue, Facilitator, Social and Therapeutic Horticulturalist)

[O]n an emotional basis the activities need to be fun, they need to be distracting from normal life, they need to raise self-esteem and so I try and have things that are creative and give people choices, and then [they] take responsibility, because a lot of the people I've worked with are quite often looked after. So, in that way trying to turn it around, so you are responsible (for) something and you're giving something else and that just gives you a different aspect on life. (Jane, Facilitator, Social and Therapeutic Horticulturist)

I got to pick what I wanted to do, I mean they'd often bring out [a] list and suggestions and sometimes I do something a little bit different. I remember one time I did try the axe thing and no injuries came of it, but I just wasn't enjoying it. So, I asked to stop, and I was allowed to stop. (ES, Participant, Community Garden)

Several participants appreciated the facilitators' flexible approach to activities and to be trusted to choose or create the activities they engaged with, to try things their way, and for their choices and input to be validated. Through this attentive and joint process the facilitators and participants work together to identify the participants' understanding of their situation and expectations from participating at the nature-based intervention (Cooper and McLeod, 2007). Through working together on activities trust is fostered due to the facilitator demystifying what occurs within therapeutic encounters and through the development of an unthreatening relationship, which attempts to equalise the power imbalance present (Cooper and McLeod, 2007; Mearns and Thorne, 2007). As such, participants become aware that the facilitators' care towards them and their wellbeing is genuine, which can feel like they have an ally supporting their growth (Mearns and Cooper, 2018). Within psychotherapy when there is consensus between the counsellor and client regarding what will help this increases the effectiveness of the therapy, as there are reduced dropout rates and the therapeutic relationship is stronger (Cooper and McLeod, 2007). As such, the co-

creation of personalised activities supports participants engagement and wellbeing at the time of participation.

For participants to develop awareness of which kinds of activities support their wellbeing can also influence their long-term wellbeing practices and identity. For example, Alex returned to a nature-based intervention during a period of mental health difficulties, due to her previous beneficial experience, as she recognised reconnecting with outdoor activities that are meaningful for her was important for supporting her wellbeing.

After the breakdown I realised I need to keep it part of my life, the actual hands on - the soil and the tools and the outdoors. (Alex, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

Alex continues to maintain and enhance her mental wellbeing through engaging in growing food as a member of a community garden that nourishes her being and belonging (Ward et al., 2022). Alex's improvement in self-awareness and movement towards a fulfilling sense of self and belonging echoes findings by Fernee et al.'s (2021) 12-month follow-up study of adolescents involved in wilderness therapy, where the participants' encounters with facilitated activities provided the first step in a process of personal growth that the individual participants continued afterwards.

6.3.2 The role of trust on participants' becoming

The development of trusting relationships is empowering for participants, as through this affective engagement the facilitator is providing encouragement to the participant to engage with their internal evaluations to support exploring their interests, capabilities, and perspectives. Through participants' choices being validated, they develop meaningful engagement (Hassink et al., 2010), and increase their self-confidence and self-worth (Kogstad et al., 2014). This in-turn develops the participants' autonomy as they experience the effect of their choices, which attunes them to their

internal valuations and develops trust in their own judgements (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1961).

I suppose at the heart of that is their own inner wisdom, that they are now tuning into, they've got the awareness to go, 'well actually this is something that feels right for me' and trusting that and I think that's a lot of what we're talking about here is learning to trust yourself and tapping into a deeper knowing of, rather than just, 'this is what I think it's about,' where we know our whole body wisdom. (Gary, Facilitator, Ecotherapy)

This learning occurs through the facilitators' trust in the participants firstly, as capable and knowledgeable and secondly, to act appropriately in dynamic environments. Through being trusted by facilitators, participants' process of becoming is positively influenced. Several participants valued being encouraged to share their knowledge and skills by the facilitators. For example, Daniel discussed the short- and long-term benefits of being asked to provide some workshops at an ecotherapy garden, where he shared his knowledge on bushcraft and tool maintenance. Daniel developed a sense of achievement from the workshops:

[F]elt good just showing people how to do simple stuff I know, I've taught myself how to do. ... They will ask people how they thought of it and it's always positive.

Daniel also discussed his aim to return to the ecotherapy garden to provide further workshops, as he enjoyed doing the workshops and wants to give back to the garden due to his beneficial experience. Daniel's desire to give back resonates with Body and Hogg's (2019) proposal that positive relationships that respect and give a voice to young people create ongoing beneficial effects. This includes participants developing a lasting connection to individuals and organisations and a desire to help and support peers.

Meanwhile, Tomasz, a long-term participant at an environmental conservation project, discussed being encouraged by the facilitator to provide the safety talk to new volunteers. Elaine, the facilitator of the project, also discussed encouraging group members to share their knowledge as this enhances the participants' understanding of the skills involved when using tools. Despite the facilitator's belief that he has the knowledge, Tomasz discussed that sometimes he found leading the safety talk challenging, as he was concerned, he may not recall all the safety and usage information of the various tools involved. Tomasz noted he preferred providing the safety talk when he volunteered, as then he could prepare what he has to say. However, it was through Tomasz being encouraged and trusted by the facilitator as capable that has led him to volunteering to give the safety talk. Leading the talks has benefited Tomasz's self-confidence. This echoes findings at wilderness therapy programmes where the appropriate level of facilitator support and encouragement helped participants to challenge themselves and improve their self-efficacy (Conlon et al., 2018; McIver et al., 2018). This suggests that the facilitators' belief in participants' knowledge and skills is an important aspect in co-creating affective experiences for participants. For young people, due to their lives often being mediated at home, school or work, the experience of being respected and valued by an adult can have long-term benefits regarding the person's sense of belonging, their self-confidence and self-worth, and positively influence the development of future relationships (Body and Hogg, 2019).

Anne, a facilitator of gardening and walking groups, also recognised by supporting participants to share their knowledge of, for example, wildlife or trees, led to the participants becoming the experts of the group. This is empowering for participants as their contribution is valued, especially during times of emotional distress, which can impact a person's sense of worth, confidence and efficacy (Schmid, 2018; Warner, 2018). For young people at nature-based interventions to experience being respected and valued by facilitators supports a sense of community, and the development of a belief in their own abilities (Hassink et al., 2010; Kogstad et al., 2014). Participants' improved sense of belonging, confidence and efficacy can act as a steppingstone towards further satisfying activities. For example, Daniel is now volunteering at a farm

and is seeking a farm-based apprenticeship and Tomasz went onto college, to work in catering and is considering an outdoor-based job.

The second way that facilitators demonstrated their trust in participants was through trusting them to use tools safely and responsibly. Nature-based interventions occur in dynamic environments, where the facilitator needs to ensure an appropriate balance between challenge and risk to support participants' personal development (Conlon et al., 2018; Juster-Horsfield and Bell, 2022). How facilitators perceive participants' capabilities and the risks present will affect if an enabling or disabling environment is formed. Von Benzon's (2017) study, involving learning disabled young people and school-based nature activities (horticulture, residential camps), proposes that the coordinator's perception of learning disabled young people as vulnerable and dangerous, as well as the wooded and water environments as risky led to highly structured and supervised activities. This in-turn limited the young people's independent engagement with the natural environment and activities, reducing their enjoyment and limiting their opportunities to become confident and familiar with these environments.

In contrast to this heavily managed approach, several facilitators discussed trusting participants to engage in risky activities and environments (ones the participants may not be allowed to engage in at home or school), which co-created enabling environments. For example, Alasdair, a facilitator at a community garden discussed trusting participants, including learning disabled young people, to use petrol powered machinery (e.g., mini tractor) in the garden. Meanwhile, the board of trustees were concerned that the participants would damage the machinery. Alasdair viewed it as important for participants to be trusted to use the machinery as it supported their engagement and enjoyment of the gardening activities.

Interviewer: For me, I wonder if being shown what to do and then trusted to do it even if say someone's just keeping an eye on you depending on what it is, that feels rather empowering 'cause I think sometimes, with learning difficulties or mental health, people think you're not as capable.

Alasdair: Yeah, yeah, definitely yeah. I think that's a good thing to do and people like [it], quite often people when they're using the tractor for example are totally overjoyed about it, they are like 'wow this is brilliant'.

Through facilitators balancing the risks and rewards of activities, participants develop trusting relationships with the facilitator and their peers and learn how to assess and manage risks, building their exposure to tolerable risks (Gill, 2010; Kraftl, 2013). Secondly, the facilitator and the group sharing responsibility to manage their own risk during the activities actively engages the participants to look after themselves (Beames et al., 2012). This is empowering for participants as the facilitator is demonstrating their trust in the participants to be responsible when taking part in risky activities, which enables participants to take on responsibility that impacts positively on their confidence and self-identification due to their perception of being a valued and constructive member of the group (Hassink et al., 2010; McIver et al., 2018). This trust also supports participants' self-confidence and self-efficacy in assessing and managing hazards in their everyday, which can impact on their personal behaviours, for example, being more responsible and self-reliant in their decision making (Beames et al., 2012; Gill, 2010; Knight, 2009).

Meanwhile, Sue, a social and therapeutic horticulturalist, discussed engaging with school children, who experienced a range of emotional and learning difficulties, which were framed as behavioural problems at school. The activities the young people took part in were part of an educational qualification, but Sue noticed broader benefits emerging from their engagement, including improved self-confidence and self-worth.

[I]t was great to get them out of the environment of the school, somewhere they were being treated a bit more as adults, being trusted to do things, being given tools, and being trusted not to hit each other over the heads. Going into a park and interacting with adults as well, which made them feel quite grown up, they were interacting with the parks manager, and they would do work in the park planting bulbs and members of the public would walk past and say, 'oh you

are doing a great job'. I just started to get a real sort of sense of that empowerment to them as young people.

Sue's trust in the young people also had further additional benefits, due to adult members of the public interacting with them and praising the work they were doing, which recognised the work the young people were engaged in as meaningful and purposeful. In the park, due to these trusting and respecting interactions, the power imbalance between the young people and adults is reduced, compared to in schools, where power is unequal and typically controlled by the teachers (Mills and McGregor, 2013). This sharing of power, if still unequal, respects the young people's personal power, affirming to the person they are capable and that their actions can be constructive, which underpins the improved self-confidence and self-worth Sue identified in the participants (Cook and Monk, 2020; Rogers, 1978). Sue's experience echoes findings from McIver et al.'s (2018) study of a wilderness therapy programme for young people, which recognised the key role of interpersonal relationships in influencing participants' wellbeing. The affective relationships offered by staff to the young people, firstly, contrasted with the young people's previous experience of authority figures as critical, neglectful, and abusive, and secondly, nurtured the young people's trust, confidence, and self-worth, via the encouragement and support offered by the staff.

As I have demonstrated, the facilitators' trust in participants supports improvements to the participants' being and belonging at the time and can also have longer term impacts, including on their career choices and wellbeing practices. This again highlights the role of facilitators' intentions and actions in influencing longer-term beneficial changes in participants' lives. For participants, to experience, making decisions and being responsible for the outcomes, supports their sense of agency, which can be especially important for young people as many of their decisions are made for them at home or in school. For young people to have a relationship with a trustworthy person, where they are recognised as an individual, their contributions respected and valued, and to be trusted to act constructively, can be pivotal in their lives (Body and Hogg, 2019; Ritchie and Ord, 2017). At nature-based interventions, the facilitators' trust in

the participants affirms the participants' autonomy as their choices and capabilities are respected, which acknowledges the participants' control over their lives (Mearns and Thorne, 2007). This supports participants to build up a wealth of evidence regarding trusting their self, which means that the participants' experiences can be transformative, due to enabling a personalised way of being that supports flourishing (Kaley et al., 2019).

6.4 Reciprocal affective encounters: participants as co-creators & co-receivers

As I established in Chapter 5, participants are agentic in their participation at nature-based interventions. An area in which participants demonstrated their agency was in the giving and receiving of peer support. Peer support involves sharing lived experience in reciprocal emotional and social interactions, which are accepting, empathic, and respectful (Fortuna et al., 2022; Mead et al., 2001). Researchers of peer support groups have found that peer support empowers the people involved, promoting firstly, their self-worth and self-confidence, secondly, their self-efficacy and hope in processing their experiences and challenges, and thirdly, supports social inclusion and community belonging (Repper and Carter, 2011). The majority of participants recognised and valued peer support as an affective aspect of their encounters. The peer support participants described particularly focused on being non-judgmentally accepted by their peers. As noted in my literature review (Chapter 2), the value of social interactions is recognised as being beneficial to participants' short-term wellbeing, however the underlying relational processes involved that enables these affective social interactions has not been considered. As such in this section, I explore the formation of peer groups at nature-based interventions and then focus on the role of acceptance as a relational quality that has a significant effect on participants' experience at the time and over their lifecourse.

I think it's a lot easier for people to share and talk once you're doing practical work. I think it's also the time when people create the shared experiences of being in nature and you'll see things and people will spot things and share knowledge. (Mhairi, Facilitator, Environmental Conservation)

[I]f nothing else you've always got what you're doing in common, which is usually enough. (Mike, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

Some of the facilitators suggested the interactions between participants were a source of support and growth for participants. This occurred firstly, through participants developing shared experiences together during the activities, which supported their sharing of experiences and promoted discussions. This observation from facilitators is supported by several participants who discussed that working together on activities provided a source of conversation, which in turn supported their social interactions at the nature-based intervention. These shared experiences at nature-based interventions create an affiliation between the members of the group, creating and sustaining a community that over time can offer social and personal support (Bishop and Purcell, 2013; Harris, 2017; Sudmann, 2018).

Secondly, supportive peer groups were also formed through participants sharing their lived experiences with one another during activities. For example, Anne discussed that within the walking group she facilitates, the participants often found the group to be supportive of one another. Whilst Anne recognised the aim of the walking group was not to provide therapy, it became a therapeutic environment due to the peer support present. Anne recognised many of these conversations involved intimate discussions, including participants discussing their health and housing situation, as well as participants benefiting from having their experiences validated and normalised.

[I]t became very much a support group, it was people, often we didn't talk about wildlife at all which is fine.

[T]he sharing of people's lives as we go around and people just slow down mentally. You see them slow down and as you step in with a walk you can hear the conversations going on and some people say, 'oh I've been waiting for this all week', they're kind of saving up the stress and then as they are walking,

they're chatting, they're looking for people that they know so they can have those conversations.

Whilst the activity of walking in nature brought the participants together, it appears it was the co-created enabling environment that the participants looked forward to, as it provided a space in which to share personal issues. This echoes findings from nature-based interventions studies, regarding care farms, therapeutic horticulture and blue exercise, where the researchers found that participants valued being part of a group that offered acceptance of diverse experiences and expressions of identity, emotional support, and created a sense of belonging between the participants based on their lived experiences and co-created shared experiences (Bishop and Purcell, 2013; Elings and Hassink, 2008; Gibbs et al., 2022). The peer groups formed provide reciprocal relationships informed by the participants' lived experience, which are beneficial to participants when experiencing emotional distress (Muir and McGrath, 2018). For example, within the peer groups formed at nature-based interventions, a participant with mental health problems is not viewed as a person with deficits, but someone who has relevant experience and understanding, as such each participant can make valuable contributions to the group (Turk et al., 2022). Subsequently, the peer groups co-create a therapeutic environment in which participants can explore and process their experiences amongst people who will not judge them. Through participants experiencing acceptance from their fellow group members they experience being valued, move towards acceptance of themselves, and develop trust in their self, which supports their self-expression and an internal locus of evaluation (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1961).

The affective peer groups which are formed may also be influenced due to the diversity of participants present, including age, gender, and health experiences, with several participants recognising these different aspects as benefiting their experiences. For example, regarding age diversity, for Alex to be involved in a group with older people was important to her during a time of mental distress, which was impacted by her colleagues, who were of a similar age to her, excluding her at work. Through participating, Alex rediscovered aspects of herself through belonging to a group of

people, where she felt unpressurised and could be real about her mental health difficulties (Elings and Hassink, 2008).

[I]t's not like you're surrounded by your peers and it's sometimes comforting to be surrounded by people of not your peer group but older people. I don't know why, there isn't that kind of comparing, oh I'm doing such and such at this point in my life, there isn't that. I remember it was a very comforting group to be in at that time. (Alex, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

Meanwhile Emma recalled a story of a fellow younger participant repeatedly locking her in a chicken coop, which he found very funny. Whilst Emma found the repeated experiences frustrating (and would often keep the padlocks in her pockets), she also found it relaxing and refreshing as the young boy's silliness contrasted with school where she was being bullied for not wearing make-up and her classmates were obsessing over boyfriends and exams. As such, Emma would finish her job and then calmly wait for someone to let her out. For both Alex and Emma there is an element of respite from their everyday issues due to socially interacting with people of a different age. These social interactions can also support the development of different perspectives on issues and create a sense of belonging, which reduces social isolation (Elings and Hassink, 2008; O'Brien, 2018). As such, the nature-based interventions provided a third place for participants to school and work (see Chapter 5), where the participants can safely express and develop their way of being, for example, away from peer pressures and social constructions of being a young person.

An aspect of a third place is the role of non-judgemental acceptance, with the majority of participants discussing experiencing being non-judgementally accepted as significant to their affective experiences at nature-based interventions.

Exactly the shared humanity, because these groups are usually very accepting and encouraging of whatever your abilities or background, they kind of nurture and try to include everyone. (Alex, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

I think that people felt that it didn't matter if their clothes weren't very clean or it didn't matter if they had issues with [their] mental health or they felt depressed or they really struggled to get up in the morning, because chances are there be somebody else who would say 'oh yeah that's me, I feel like that as well'. (Anne, Facilitator, Gardening and Walking Groups)

The interactions that occur between peers at nature-based interventions may be different to the interactions participants typically encounter in their daily life. For example, participants recalled being received and responded to differently to their norm, including being accepted without judgement and given space for self-expression rather than their identity and behaviours controlled and negatively commented on.

[P]eople within the circle will talk about the benefits for themselves and how they look forward to coming ... their own perceptions of how they are treated perhaps in other places. How they can fit within this group as much or as little, I think that's where the learning and the growth comes. (Elaine, Facilitator, Environmental Conservation)

This feeling of social acceptance supports participants to continue to engage with the nature-based intervention, as well as support participants with taking part in the activities and learning from their engagement (Harris, 2017; Sachs et al., 2022). Within supportive group environments participants' perception of themselves and their situation can change, which leads to constructive actions that help them respond to situations, even when the circumstances remain the same, in ways which are beneficial rather than detrimental to their wellbeing and belonging (Hobbs, 1951). As noted earlier, for Alex the “*shared humanity*” she encountered, along with the joy she took from being involved in outdoor activities, are two significant aspects she has recognised she requires in her life to maintain and enhance her mental wellbeing. Subsequently, an important wellbeing practice for her, is belonging to a community garden, where she continues to encounter these two affective aspects.

Participants' acceptance of one another co-creates unpressurised environments. For Jaanki, who volunteered briefly at an environmental conservation programme when a teenager, her experience was profound, as it "*hooked [her] on the outdoors*". Jaanki, now working in environmental education, recognised that due to her ethnic background a career in the environmental sector was not a traditional choice (see Chapter 7).

I'm saying I love this, so I'm aware that it sounds odd, but it was how it was being in that kind of space, where I could just hack things back, there wasn't the pressure to chat to anyone if I didn't want to, but actually everyone's really welcoming and friendly ... so I think again that acceptance. (Jaanki, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

Several other participants also valued being welcomed at the nature-based intervention, for example, ES, recognised the group she encountered was non-judgemental, where no one commented on her movements or questioned the activities she took part in.

[I]t's fine if you weren't what society perceives as normal, it was fine, it didn't matter you could still be there and work on things so that was nice, 'cause in a way it still also made me feel less alone in that regard when I did get my diagnosis.

I didn't feel like my every movement was being scrutinised.

For ES, at the community garden there was the creation of a set of different social norms, involving acceptance rather than judgement, which helped her feel less alone, providing a sense of belonging (Adams and Morgan, 2018; Mearns and Cooper, 2018). This contrasted with her experiences at school where she felt an outsider and not included in friendship groups.

[W]hen I was in the gardens even if we were all out doing different things in different parts of the gardens it still felt like a group and like I was actually supposed to be there and that was really nice.

I felt like I was supposed to be there, rather than being in a group but feeling on the outside like when you've got people who are sitting there and chatting and then you're kind of there on the corner.

ES' experience resonates with findings from Elings and Hassink's (2008) study of care farms, where participants developed a sense of belonging as their individual expressions were accepted and respected. Social interactions informed by acceptance affirm a person's sense of self and support the development of trust in self and others, enabling a person to engage socially as they are (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1961). For people who have been isolated, social interactions at nature-based intervention can act as a steppingstone to other activities (Adams and Morgan, 2018; Elings and Hassink, 2008). For example, Tomasz, due to a long-term health condition, was home educated and he joined two environmental conservation groups to re-enter a more socially diverse world. Due to Tomasz's positive experiences interacting with others, he developed his social skills and went on to college for three years, which led to employment within the catering sector.

[G]oing out, meeting people or like pushing your confidence back up and with [name of group] and [name of group] it was like that step again, to build again, to meet people again. (Tomasz, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

The above highlights several beneficial experiences involving non-judgmental acceptance. Recognising the role of acceptance in these affective experiences is important as when a participant is met with acceptance by their peers this supports their self-determination as their choices and expressions are affirmed (Mearns and Cooper, 2018; Wilkins, 2000). These types of interactions co-create a safe space as the participant does not fear being rejected by their peers, but instead are met with kindness, reducing separation from others and supporting belonging (Mearns and

Cooper, 2018). Finally, through a participant belonging to an accepting space this can enable constructive change, as participants are supported to trust their self and not conform to other people's expectations, expressed by participants as improved self-confidence and self-worth (Mearns and Thorne, 2007).

An example of beneficial change is participants being able to express their emotions with actions that match how they feel. A person's accurate representation of emotions improves their wellbeing by reducing emotional distress as a person is not distorting or denying their experience (Rogers, 1961). For example, ES, recalled a day where she felt very low and incredibly upset at school and that through participating at the garden, she was able to express her emotions and relieve her tension.

I'm glad that I went to the gardens afterwards, 'cause I think it gave me a way to just vent that out in a more productive way, rather than going home and then lying down. (ES, Participant, Community Garden)

Belonging to an accepting environment supports participants to congruently express their emotions, which provides participants with experiences that enables a cohesive and autonomous sense of self to develop (Warner, 2018). Participants can use these formative experiences to create longer-term practices for dealing with difficult emotions. For example, Colleen discussed developing a mental health toolkit which is informed by her experiences, which include experiences from her participation at a community garden. Colleen shared an experience that she found empowering in the moment and provided an analogy for the processing of her problems.

Colleen: I remember the first time I was handed a mattock⁴ and I thought what am I going to do with this? And then by the end of the session I was like 'oh yeah this is really empowering'. I quite like smashing up big clods of dirt and stuff, it was brilliant for me, because, things I've said before, just being physical and doing something

⁴ A mattock is a hand tool, with a long handle and horizontal and vertical blades, used for digging.

tangible and looking back and going oh this is what I've done today. Absolutely brilliant for my mental health.

Interviewer: *That's great and was there something about the sort of smashing up the clods of dirt, was there any sort of emotional processing going on?*

Collen: *At that time, I probably felt like life was quite unfair and much more negative about things, so yes now you've said that I think there was quite a lot of satisfaction in just banging something (both laugh) and breaking it into little bits and going ok here's a big problem I can break it down into smaller chunks.*

As I have demonstrated, the peer groups provide meaningful social interactions that do not intrude on participants' individual personal power and co-create an aliveness that is often missing in the other places the participants inhabit. These peer groups are dynamic, being informed by the participants' lived experience, as well as emerging through the interactions between the participants (Smith et al., 2010). The peer groups support participants' self-expression, emotional processing and regulation, and provide a sense of belonging to a community, which is accepting, compassionate and empathic towards them and their situation. As such, the peer groups counter social isolation and the associated emotional distress and loneliness that are often interlinked with being marginalized within society (Muir and McGrath, 2018). Within a peer group the participants encounter non-judgemental relationships which support their internal decision making and values their lived experience (Hobbs, 1951; Rogers, 1961). Subsequently, being part of a peer group supports participants to develop confidence and trust in themselves, to value their unique sense of self and engage in practices that maintains and enhances their belonging at the time and beyond the nature-based intervention.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have highlighted the role of interpersonal relationships at nature-based interventions, firstly, as a significant factor in co-creating affective participation

and secondly, as an influence on the participants' wellbeing at the time of participation and across the participants' lifecourse. My focus on the personal qualities of non-judgemental acceptance, empathic understanding, genuineness, and trust emphasises the importance of facilitators and participants as affective actants at nature-based interventions. These personal qualities underpin the facilitators adaptable approach, which co-creates person-centred encounters for the participants that provide respite and appropriate challenges, influencing participants' short and long-term wellbeing. The facilitators' flexible approach to participants' engagement also demonstrates the facilitators' acceptance, care, and trust towards participants. Meanwhile, the participants are also active members of peer groups, which are accepting and supportive of each other, contributing to the formation of enabling environments at nature-based interventions.

The facilitators' and participants' interactions form therapeutic environments, which offer participants short-term respite from emotional distress and transformative experiences. This occurs as the affective personal qualities of non-judgemental acceptance, empathy, and genuineness are facilitative as they do not place conditions of worth on participants' experience. This supports participants to develop insight and awareness, which enables them to accept, value and trust themselves. This in-turn supports participants to reconnect to their organismic valuing process and develop alternative perspectives and helpful practices, which are guided by their internal locus of evaluation. As such, participants can freely express themselves at nature-based interventions, whilst also exploring the effects of their participation, promoting greater self-confidence, self-worth, and belonging. As a person's experience of their world more closely aligns with their actions within it their emotional distress decreases and their wellbeing improves. This process can be transformational by facilitating participants' movement towards a more authentic sense of self with a greater trust in self, enabling the flow of benefits from an intervention into participants' daily lives. For example, the long-term effects of participation include influencing participants' undertaking of study and choosing careers which align with their values and passions, as well as the formation of practices which maintain and enhance mental wellbeing. I

will critically discuss these long-term effects on participants becoming in the next chapter.

Finally, I contribute to our understanding of therapeutic landscapes as spaces where wellbeing is affected through intra- and interpersonal processes. Through drawing on person-centred psychotherapy for understanding the nature of a person I present a concept of a person that can help us understand how participants co-create transformations and long-term wellbeing practices from their participation. This concept of a person accounts for beneficial changes in participants becoming via improved self-awareness, self-confidence, self-worth, and belonging. By bringing person-centred psychotherapy to the concept of therapeutic landscapes, firstly, more prominence is given to the agency of the people involved in the therapeutic encounters. Secondly, I provide a depth of understanding to why relationships are part of the therapeutic process and how they can facilitate or hinder people's agency and potential.

Chapter 7 Becoming: Being and Belonging across the lifecourse

7.1 Introduction

In this final empirical chapter, I critically discuss the long-term effects of participants' encounters at nature-based interventions on their process of becoming. In the previous two chapters I have firstly, considered the importance of situating the facilitators and participants in their biography to highlight their agency regarding their motivation, intentions, and interactions. Secondly, I have argued for the role of interpersonal relations, which are characterised by non-judgemental, empathic, and genuine interactions as a vital aspect of how participation at nature-based interventions co-create beneficial influences on a participants' mental wellbeing. I propose that the meeting of participants' agency with these affective relations co-create longer-term effects on participants' sense of self, through empowering participants to believe in themselves. This provides a foundation for their flourishing, as highlighted by their study, work, and life choices. This includes the participants' preference for engaging, across their lifecourse, with places and communities that echo the affective spaces they experienced at nature-based interventions.

As I highlighted in my literature review of nature-based interventions (see Chapter 2), researchers have paid little attention to the longevity of the beneficial effects of participation. Instead, there has been a focus on the short-term impacts of participating in nature-based interventions on recovery and providing respite rather than considering them as spaces of transformation with longer-term influences on participants' wellbeing. Whilst the limited follow-up studies (three to 18 months) conducted have found that the positive changes that occur to participants' wellbeing during nature-based interventions continue post attendance, how these beneficial effects are co-created and sustained is unknown (e.g., Bowen et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2017; Stigsdotter et al., 2018). Subsequently, focusing on how participants relate their process of becoming to their participation provides insight firstly, into the longevity of the effects of participation. Secondly, the processes involved in co-creating changes to participants' wellbeing and the sustaining and enhancing of beneficial

change across the participants' lifecourse. This relates to Fernee et al.'s (2021) call to explore in depth and unpack concepts of self to further understand the complexity of the psychosocial processes that are occurring at nature-based interventions to facilitate long-term shifts to participants' sense of self (Harrod et al., 2023).

I begin by considering participants' experience of flourishing through exploring their increase in self-confidence and self-worth and the expression of this, across the lifecourse, through the participants' study, work, and life choices. Next, I discuss the role of participants' sense of belonging to affective communities and/or connection with nature as significant aspects of their maintenance and enhancement of their long-term wellbeing. Finally, I consider how participants responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, as an example of a life-event that causes disruption to the participants' everyday, to understand the resilience of their practices developed from their initial participation. Through my critical discussion, I contribute to our understanding of therapeutic landscapes as spaces which can have ongoing affects after and outside the original therapeutic event. I frame this understanding of therapeutic landscapes through person-centred psychotherapy's conceptualisation of the person. As such, I establish the importance of understanding the nature of a person as a significant aspect of understanding the long-term effects of participation at nature-based interventions.

7.2 Being: nurturing a 'good life'

Within the nature-based intervention literature, the majority of the follow-up studies have considered the sustaining of the beneficial effects of participation through the use of pre- and post-intervention self-reported measures on aspects of mental wellbeing (e.g., Smyth et al., 2022; Stigsdotter et al., 2018; Willert et al., 2014). However, when standardised metric tests are used the context and meaning of people's experience are removed through the standardising of intricate experiences. As such, it is unknown if the benefits reported by participants relate to the influence of the nature-based intervention or to other factors in their lives. Studies which have used qualitative methodologies provide some context and proposals for the sustaining of beneficial

changes, these include: the continuing use of mindful noticing and practices, which reduced stress (Sahlin et al., 2014); the creation of similar situations to those experienced at the nature-based intervention providing everyday occupations that are enjoyable and meaningful (Pálsdóttir et al., 2014); and increased self-awareness and acceptance, which underpins increased agency and independence (Fernee et al., 2021). I build on these proposed pathways towards maintaining beneficial change by considering the role of increased self-worth as a key factor in the longevity of beneficial effects from participation. Self-worth is important as it provides a person with a foundation for valuing and accepting their unique self. I consider how from this foundation a person can build a vibrant and fulfilling life through engaging in meaningful occupation, including study and work, as well as purposefully creating and experiencing life enriching experiences.

7.2.1 Increasing self-worth: a foundation for flourishing

I begin with a vignette about Colleen, who participated at a community garden, this was for her Duke of Edinburg Gold Award, but also a part of a larger intention to support and improve her mental health. This vignette represents two of the major themes from the analysis regarding living a good life - the development of participants' self-confidence and self-worth and the provision of a pathway to meaningful study and/or work (see section 7.2.2).

Colleen had a fairly happy and settled childhood, which included enjoying outdoor activities with her family and their dog. However, at seventeen she become overwhelmed with anxiety due to a teacher telling her class that their Scottish Higher exams were the most important of their life. Colleen felt under enormous pressure due to this and also thought what about her next exams and the following years – what did this mean regarding their importance? Life suddenly felt very stressful for her. Colleen experienced problems with her sleep, attending school, seeing friends, and engaging with her hobbies (reading, running). She described this time as being lost in a fog. Collen, whilst supported by her parents, became isolated due to social

anxiety and having no confidence in herself or her future. Collen saw a GP, where she was given a diagnosis of 'anxiety' and 'depression', but she found this unhelpful, and it set her back. For the diagnosis sounded fixed to her and she thought she would suffer in this isolating fog for the rest for her life.

At around 18 Colleen felt she had hit rock bottom, as her friends had left for university and she was left in a rural town, where there was not much to do. Over time she realised this way of being was no way to live and her first reconnection with her previous activities, was to complete the final expedition for her Duke of Edinburg Silver Award. This involved a weekend away with people who did not know her as a 'miserable person' for the past year, which Colleen felt was a manageable first step. She found it a fantastic experience due to meeting new people, being outdoors, and learning that she could make it through by putting one foot in front of the other. This led her to completing the Gold Award, which included volunteering at the community garden. The community garden was a very beneficial experience that has endured throughout Colleen's life, regarding positively influencing her wellbeing and outdoor practices.

Colleen chose the community garden with the intention that it would support her getting outside, meeting people, and learning new skills. Despite taking steps towards reengaging with meaningful and joyful aspects of her life, including study (psychology) and running, Colleen was still nervous about attending the community garden, especially meeting new people. However, at the garden she found that she enjoyed the activities, which provided a way to engage with other people and a sense of enjoyment and achievement through shaping the garden. She also found the caring and warm support on offer beneficial, especially the facilitator who became a mentor to her and has influenced her personal and professional way of being. The ethos of the community garden is that it is a learning garden, and nothing is perfect, which Colleen has applied to herself, reducing the pressure on her actions, and supporting her to move

onto the next thing. Colleen's self-confidence and self-worth improved as she developed belonging through becoming part of something bigger than herself. She also developed awareness regarding her mental health through relating the ups and downs of life to the passing of the seasons and the process of growing (tending to herself with supportive practices). Participating at the community garden set the trajectory for Colleen's life, firstly as it has supported her to develop supportive practices for her mental, physical, and social health. Secondly, as she is now the facilitator and enjoys the rewarding community focused work, especially when she is able to work with younger people who are experiencing personal difficulties. Colleen is aware the role doesn't conform to societal expectations in terms of her education level, having a professional career, and the pay, but she has embraced the role as part of her identity, due to the benefits she received, and those she sees it providing to others.

The long-term influence on Colleen's process of becoming from her participation at the community garden can be understood by considering the effects of an affective environment on her actualising tendency. At the community garden Colleen, including her nerves and low confidence, was met with supportive interactions. These affective relationships co-created a safe and encouraging environment, where she was able to engage in the activities without judgement. Through this unconditional participation she was able to explore and decide which kinds of experiences nourish or diminish her. In essence she reconnected with her organismic valuing process as a source of valuing her experiences. Colleen's movement towards nourishing activities and practices supported her actualising tendency as she developed self-confidence in her capabilities and self-awareness of how to maintain and enhance her wellbeing. Colleen's valuing and trust in herself developed her self-worth, which is expressed by her acceptance of a role, which is personally meaningful and rewarding rather than conforming to external judgements. A person's movement away from the expectations of others, and towards being more open to each moment as it is (reducing defensives such as perfectionism) and trusting oneself to make decisions are aspects of becoming, where a person aims to live to their full potential (Rogers, 1961; 1963).

I've just gained so much confidence speaking to people. I'm running sessions, I'm running that place, go back ten years that was unthinkable. So, the transformation for me has just been absolutely huge by doing that tangible work. (Colleen, Participant, Community Garden)

Participants developing their self-confidence and self-worth was a common factor. As with Colleen, the participants attributed these improvements to developing their skills or knowledge through participating in the activities, which improved their trust in and valuing of their abilities, alongside social interactions within a non-judgemental and understanding space. This echoes findings across a range of nature-based interventions that suggest the role of facilitated activities that challenges participants' perception of themselves develops participants' self-confidence (Conlon et al., 2018; Kogstad et al., 2014; Merenda, 2021).

I built a confidence in myself from doing the activities, because I'd be pushing myself past different boundaries and confronting fears. (Gill, Participant, Green and Blue Exercise)

[D]efinitely helps it for me, like if I two years ago if I was gonna go somewhere like this [farm] and I didn't know what I was doing, so say if I had to put up a fence, and I didn't know it, I'd be freaking out. So, it helps in that aspect, I'm not got to be like that now. If things are different, I'm just 'oh yep I'll do that' or if not, I can be taught how to. (Daniel, Participant, Ecotherapy)

I mean it pushed me in a lot of ways I think beyond having to be pushed beyond the obvious of like pushing me to have to talk to strangers, it was like 'well I guess I can do this thing' and as I progressed through, I ended up doing like team leading on some projects and with like corporate teams and stuff like that. That was very much, 'well I guess I'll do it' and then you sort of reached the end of it and you go, 'oh I did that, I guess I can do that', so there was a lot of

confidence building within it really, realise that things can be done. (Mike, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

By the participants challenging their perceptions regarding their beliefs and capabilities this leads to meaningful experiences and improved resilience, which increases their self-worth and supports purposeful living (Bowen et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2017). For example, after her initial participation Gill later learnt to sail, an activity she had thought unavailable to her due to being working-class. She went onto become a sailing instructor providing sailing breaks to learning disabled young people, a role she has carried out for the last 25 years. These sailing breaks nourish Gill by providing meaning and special moments through supporting young people to engage in adventurous activities. Colleen, Gill, Daniel, and Mike's experiences echoes Eriksson et al.'s (2010) suggestion that participating at a nature-based intervention enables participants to re-evaluate their self-image, due to the presence of non-judgemental and empathic interactions. This relational support empowers participants to engage constructively, act more authentically, and become more aware of their own needs and what they enjoy, which create a shift towards self-rewarding activities (Pálsdóttir et al., 2014; Sahlin et al., 2014). As such, the self-worth a person develops in a therapeutic landscape has the potential to be transformative, becoming the foundation for long-term shifts in valuing and expressing of a self that provides purpose and joy across the lifecourse. This occurs due to participants' development of trust in their organismic valuing process and internal valuations, which supports them to continue personally meaningful practices that support their tendency to actualise (Rogers, 1961). A process passionately emphasised by Daisy May, a participant at environmental conservation projects, where she moved towards an authentic identity that supports her self-worth and provides a sense of purpose and belonging within the world.

[A]ctually finding something that I'm good at and I understand, and I love, it's just such an amazing feeling.

I think for me doing conservation is very much self-worth. My purpose is conservation and I know that if I didn't have that I don't think I'd want to exist cause it's because it's everything to me, it's my true belonging.

Participants' development of self-worth means they value their unique self, trusting their abilities and own judgement in choosing actions and choices which are congruent to the situation. This internal locus of evaluation means a person will meet experiences without psychological defences or distress, but are open to the experience and can respond appropriately (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1961). For example, Daniel (see the above quote), due to his participation recognises he is capable of either working out how to complete a task and/or learning the required skills by asking for support. As such, participants become unshackled by internal or external barriers, reducing emotional distress and move towards living authentically.

7.2.2 Meaningful study and work: fulfilling occupations

One long-term impact that improvements in participants' valuing of their self led to, was the undertaking of meaningful study and/or work, which reflected the participants' interests and values. The majority of facilitators also recognised that one beneficial influence for several participants was that their participation set them upon a career route or supported changing career paths. This echoes with findings regarding young people developing a sense of purpose and becoming more autonomous and agentic regarding themselves and situation after participating in wilderness therapy (Fernee et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2017).

[Y]ounger people, thinking about it, have then considered it as a career choice, for example going on to do the volunteering or choosing to study at college or university. There's one participant at the moment who wants to go and study at agricultural college now and has asked us to help that process. I think for younger people it's helping in a career sense. (Mhairi, Facilitator, Environmental Conservation and Ecotherapy)

For Emma, her interests in animal behaviour and sustainable agriculture developed due to her participation at the city farm, which influenced her choice of her first degree. Meanwhile, having learnt to manage farm animals, enabled her to undertake further volunteering opportunities which then enabled her to undertake a Masters.

I was a volunteer at [city farm] I knew how to deal with animals and that meant I could do volunteering at [name of zoo] zoo which was very competitive and that meant when I was applying to do the Masters, I think that was the thing that tipped it over the edge of whether I got in or not.

Participating at the city farm also provided Emma with a sense of perspective regarding her exams, which were perceived as a stressful event at school due to the importance her school placed on them, as she knew people who had been employed by the city farm after dropping out of school. As this was a job she would have enjoyed, this reduced her own worry about her exams, and possibly improved her own exam performance considering the trajectory of her academic education. Emma's shift in perspective suggests she had developed a greater freedom in her choices and become more creative regarding her future employment due to informing her perspective with her internal valuations rather than conforming to external expectations and norms (Rogers, 1961; 1963).

I suppose there's that sense of actually, you can be happier doing things with your hands and what you want to do, rather than just doing academic, there is lots of options.

Becoming is a relational process, as such whilst participants develop greater trust in their internal valuations due to their participation, which set them upon flourishing trajectories, they also remain part of personal or societal relations that can thwart their actualising tendency due to responding to external conditions of worth (Mearns and Thorne, 2007). For example, Gary, a participant in adventure activities, found one of the benefits of his participation was the shaping of his values towards care for others and the environment. Whilst travelling after the intervention Gary experienced a

moment he recalls of “*utter contentment*”. At the time he also had a job in telesales to support his travels, which he was doing well in, and he thought one way he could experience more moments of contentment was to earn well and “*buy his freedom*”. However, his choice of work (sales) did not match his values and was instead motivated by earning money and conforming to societal expectations (as the other way he felt he could gain that contentment again was to join a travelling community). This incongruent lifestyle was expressed in Gary’s life as stress, as he was ignoring his organismic valuing process and conforming to external expectations, resulting in a sense of self that was estranged from his organism (Rogers, 1959; 1961). Gary eventually quit his job in search for a better balance. During walks with his uncle, he started to reconnect with the outdoors, as well as discuss his situation, returning to memories of his experience at the adventure camp and what he had enjoyed and found important. This reconnection with his internal valuations led him to studying a degree in outdoor studies and then becoming a facilitator of personal development and ecotherapy based programmes. This alignment between Gary’s actions with his organismic valuing process, meant he was participating in nourishing activities that supported a meaningful sense of self and reduced incongruence, reducing his emotional distress (Rogers, 1959; 1961).

I started to come back to that summer that was so long before and reflecting on the fact that that summer was actually still in me, and really important to me and more importantly relevant and that's what got me into the degree, as well realising that this is something I love, let's go back into that.

Meanwhile Jaanki discussed her work providing her with meaning and purpose, alongside a sense of belonging. Jaanki discussed working in environmental conservation and education not being a typical career path within her culture. However, attending environmental conservation activities at 16 set Jaanki off on a path, which resonated with her enjoyment of the outdoors.

[I]t definitely sparked something. It just got me thinking about an alternative to the way everyone else does it and I think that's quite big for me, realising that there is another way.

An aspect of Jaanki's meaningful work is her desire to be a role model for other people from ethnic minorities. This desire to inspire others as she has been inspired is part of Janaki's development of long-term meaning and purpose within her life.

I think there's part of me that just believed in myself a bit more and realised that if I can do it other people can do it and if you've got someone you can see doing it, you're more likely to want to go and do it.

Janaki's experience echoes Body and Hogg (2019) discussion of the long-term influences of youth participation in voluntary projects, which proposes that through new experiences young people can find a voice that supports a lifetime engagement, and the development of a voice to effect change for self and others.



Figure 7.1 Jaanki's work environment, a place she refers to as her 'home' (Photo: Jaanki)

Jaanki described her work environment (figure 7.1) as being her 'home' due in part to the natural setting, but mainly due to the acceptance and non-judgemental attitude present, which means she experiences no expectations and is accepted for herself, supporting her to live authentically. This particularly stands out for Jaanki due to the expectations of her parents on her and her sister whilst growing up. The development of a sense of belonging is commonly reported amongst participants of nature-based interventions and the above examples suggest belonging is an aspect participants value and seek to co-create in their work lives. This resonates with Pálsdóttir et al.'s (2014) follow-up study of participants' experience of a rehabilitation garden, where the participants continued to create and value safe and understanding environments for their chosen activities, which supported improvements to their health. The significance of these affective environments was highlighted for Jaanki when she moved sectors due to the precarious conditions of short-term contracts and associated financial pressure. However, Jaanki found working in a school and then in an emergency services dispatch centre was detrimental to her mental health in part due to her missing being outdoors (both roles) and working within a toxic culture (second role). Jaanki has returned to environmental education and her emotional distress has reduced as she is supporting her actualising tendency by being part of environments which nourish her, support her trust in her internal valuations, and own sense of direction (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1961).

Highlighting the long-term effect on participants' choice of study and/or work provides new evidence of the longevity of effects from participating at nature-based interventions and the influence of therapeutic landscapes in people's life. Participants go on to develop fulfilling careers due to learning the types of experiences that are nourishing and rewarding to them, re-connecting to their organismic valuing process, and having these choices validated, enabling them to trust themselves. When participants leave and make choices that are congruent with their internal validations this supports fulfilling work, which can contribute to participants' movement to living authentically, which mitigates against emotional distress as their sense of self more closely aligns with their organism.

7.2.3 More to life: reaching beyond personal and societal constraints

For several participants there was a sense for them that there was more to life than their current situation and practices were providing them. The participants' participation with a nature-based intervention led to several participants going beyond personal and societal constraints to become involved in fulfilling short- and long-term activities and/or embrace practices that enhanced their mental wellbeing rather than diminished it. The following vignette focused on Daisy May's experience of participating in environmental conservation projects highlights the long-term impact of nature-based interventions on participants' sense of living a full and worthwhile life.

Daisy May experienced a mixed childhood where she enjoyed being with animals, going walking, and family holidays to the coast. This was the beginnings of her connection with nature. However, her mum's way of speaking to her undermined her self-confidence and self-worth and a school friend died by suicide during GCSEs. At nineteen years old Daisy May described herself as a full-time party girl, which lasted for a year, but this lifestyle was not making her happy. During this time, she was involved in a romantic relationship that did not help her situation as she was inauthentic due to trying to be someone else to please her partner. It was a period where she was not taking care of herself, but self-harming and was sectioned due to throwing herself into a river. During that year Daisy May became disconnected from nature as it lost importance to her due to her focus on drinking and partying.

After being sectioned Daisy May recognised her way of being was not helpful to her and so she decided to return to college, which led to attending university. Daisy May expected to struggle at college and university due to her unsupportive experience in school. As she reported not being supported with her dyslexia and dyscalculia at school and being told not to get her hopes up regarding what she wanted to do as she probably would not achieve it. At university, Daisy May participated in a local

environmental conservation programme run by a national conservation organisation, which supported her engagement with her degree programme as it provided her with practical experiences that enhanced her understanding. Daisy May valued this practical experience in supporting her in achieving her degree. During the environmental conservation projects Daisy May was supported by a range of facilitators who were interested in helping her flourish. As such, Daisy May also experienced broader emotional and social support from the groups. This improved her confidence due to learning new skills, meeting people who were interested in her, and developing an identity as an environmental conservationist.

Daisy May's identity as an environmental conservationist has reconnected her with nature, supporting her to maintain beneficial wellbeing practices and a sense of purpose. For example, on difficult days she will go for a walk and connect to the space around her through her senses, which she finds refreshing and supports her regulation and processing of her emotions. Daisy May has also developed a sense of purpose through making herself available to offer effective support and care to animals in distress, either as a member of a wildlife group or when out on her own. As such, where once she would have drunk to deal with emotional distress, she now finds comfort in caring for animals and relaxation through being outdoors. Daisy May's development of an authentic sense of self supports actions which are congruent with her values. Her sense of self and actions supported her to practice self-care during the COVID-19 pandemic with daily walks and setting up a community litter pick (see Chapter 5).

From Daisy May's experiences she developed a sense of purpose and authentic identity as already noted above (section 7.2.1) and nourishing practices to support her mental health. Daisy May's experience echoes findings from follow-up studies of nature-based interventions, proposing that participants acquire nature-based practices, which support them with their emotional distress (Eriksson et al., 2010; Fernee et al., 2021; Pálsdóttir et al., 2014; Trangsrud et al., 2022). These practices can promote deeper

sensory experiences, which can provide participants with respite, promote curiosity and support being mindful (Sahlin et al., 2014). Daisy May's practice of walking is a representation of her responding to her organismic valuing process and supporting her actualising tendency by engaging in experiences that support her emotional regulation and processing. Her previous practice of drinking alcohol thwarted her actualising tendency as she engaged in detrimental experiences, which disassociated her from her difficult emotions and created further internal psychological tension. Daisy May's nature-based self-care aligns with her values and as such support her to live a full life, enabling her to be with both positive and difficult experiences (Rogers, 1961).

As already mentioned, and highlighted by Daisy May's experiences, societal constraints and personal beliefs can limit a person, but it appears that by participating in nature-based interventions participants are empowered to stretch themselves and develop a sense of freedom in their decision making that is informed by their internal valuations. For example, Michael developed a courage and trust in himself from participating in adventure and environmental conservation activities, which supported him to respond to his internal locus of evaluation and move towards beneficial experiences.

I went back, it gave me the courage to go back on my own 'cause I've been to [name of country] and I came back to [name of company] and I just realised I'm so miserable, I can't do this.

I can remember, I was very stressed and it's a good thing I gave up the job, because I think I probably wouldn't have been alive now, 'cause I was that stressed, if I'd kept on like I was.

As discussed in Chapter 5, Michael had a difficult upbringing and, as with Gill, felt being working-class would limit his opportunities in life. Instead, by Michael following his internal valuations he enjoyed beneficial experiences beyond his expectations of working in a factory for his life. These experiences led him to travel and, on his return, attend college and employment as a gardener, which he enjoyed and found fulfilling. This accumulation of beneficial experiences supports Michael's maintenance and

enhancement of his self-worth. Michael attributes being courageous and following his own path to keeping him alive, as he experienced less emotional distress when living more congruently.

Meanwhile, Tomasz, who has long-term health conditions, which led him to being home-schooled and limited his social encounters and confidence, found that participating in an environmental conservation programme improved his autonomy and self-worth as he became a valued member of the group. Tomasz co-created with the group a place he belongs to, independent of his parents, which also increased his awareness of what he enjoys doing and would like to do in the future. Tomasz's contribution as a flexible, active, and social participant was recognised with a national volunteer award. For young people, having an affective space away from their home, can help them negotiate their ongoing interdependencies, which is an important aspect in developing their autonomy (Evans, 2008; Fernee et al., 2021). Tomasz has continued to participate, and his motivation has shifted from building social confidence to maintaining his independence and community belonging – by supporting other members of the group when they are having difficult weeks and by contributing to maintaining a local green space. Tomasz's participation has influenced his own autonomy, which provides Tomasz with self-confidence and self-worth, and a sense of belonging through being valued and respected by others.

I would still want to do it when I'm in my forties or fifties, maybe when I do get old and everything falls apart maybe not, but as I'm still able to move and to go out that would be the thing I would want to continue to do.

As the above examples highlights, participation at nature-based interventions can support shifts in a person's perception of their self-worth, which has long-term effects as a person has reconnected with their organismic valuing process. This reconnection with their internal locus of evaluation supports their actualising tendency to flourish and informs an identity and actions that align with the organism, reducing psychological incongruence and enabling engagement in experiences which enrich their lives (Rogers, 1959; 1961). As such, the influence of therapeutic landscape

experiences become long-term by empowering participants to become the creators of their own lives, which appears to reduce emotional distress, rather than conform to societal or personal conditions of worth, which places limits on their functioning and increases emotional distress.

7.3 Belonging: human and more-than-human communities

The development of autonomy represented by job choices, mental health practices, and rewarding experiences often led participants to developing a sense of belonging. Rogers' (1961) view of the fully functioning person involves a person who is autonomous and social. For, the process of becoming involves movement towards living authentically, where a person realises their own uniqueness and meet the challenges and needs of their interdependence with other people and the world (Schmid, 2018). People suffer distress when they are estranged from themselves and/or others. As such, the development of belonging is an essential aspect of being well and living authentically. Belonging involves co-creating a meaningful and affective attachment with a community and/or place over time (Nielsen et al., 2022). A sense of belonging can provide a person with stability and security and support the development of an authentic sense of self. Subsequently, I explore how these places and communities become entwined in a person's sense of being well, providing opportunities for nourishing human and other-than-human connection, emotional regulation, retreat, and to give to others.

7.3.1 Affective social connections: receiving and giving

Several participants discussed that participating at a nature-based intervention enabled the formation of enjoyable and meaningful social connections. Subsequently, the development of a sense of belonging to a group or community was an important factor in maintaining and enhancing participants' long-term wellbeing. This involved staying on as long-term members, due to the development of valued friendships; joining different nature-based groups due to actively seeking out likeminded people; or being

active within their local community through nature-based activities, for example, Daisy May's organisation of a community litter pick (see Chapter 5).

I think it's a mixture of having people that have been there for ages and I know really well, and they are good friends and then also people who you would otherwise just never talk to. (Emma, Participant, City Farm)

I mean there is something special about going for a walk on your own, but I really like being with a group, because most of my life I've been on my own when I've not been in a relationship, so therefore I tend to seek out groups. (Gill, Participant, Green and Blue Exercise)

A sense of belonging to a group provided participants with enriching encounters that support their social connections and reduces social isolation.

I just think it's been a very important element of keeping me above the line all the way through a vast majority of time and it has been in different guises, but it's always been there, and I don't see it not being there and I don't like to think of it not being there. (Jilly, Participant, Walking Group)

At nature-based interventions one of the significant benefits is a reduction in social isolation through enabling participants to connect to others in a safe space, (e.g., Bishop and Purcell, 2013; Ekstam et al., 2021; Hassink et al., 2010). Milligan et al. (2004) propose that these social connections can provide ongoing buffers against emotional distress through supporting a person's sense of self and providing reciprocal relationships. For example, Jilly discussed how walking as part of a group can help her with her emotional regulation and processing, which has supported her mental health over her lifecourse.

[M]aybe I've been thinking about something that's going on at work and a day with the walking group is really stressless in that sense or I might touch on something that's bothering me at a very superficial level but just get someone

else's take on it and I can choose how much or how little I speak about it which I think is really helpful.

Jilly appreciated having found a practice that enables her freedom to choose how she manages difficult situations, providing her with respite or insight depending on the choice she makes. These brief and less demanding encounters provide helpful for Jilly as they support her wellbeing (Paddon, 2020), due to enabling her to respond to her internal valuations and move towards what will be most beneficial for her in that moment. For participants' long-term wellbeing, being part of affective social relations in these groups supports their sense of self, though empowering their sense of worth and strengthening their trust in their internal locus of evaluation (Schmid, 2018).

Belonging to a community can also support participants to develop a shared purpose and feel part of something larger than their self through common connections, including the environmental setting or activities (Howarth et al., 2021). This can help people to meet the needs and challenges of others, as well as society, whilst reducing their own anxieties regarding particular issues. For example, Alex discussed the importance of being part of a community garden, where people shared an interest in caring for the environment, including using organic methods or reducing waste. For Alex, this common connection reduced the impact of political differences, supporting a shared humanity and countering Alex's own eco-anxiety.

I still want to do things that help the environment, I haven't stopped caring about the planet, but I don't let it cause me anxiety and I would like to be part of a community where people care about not just their green spaces, but their environment, their living environment. So, if I can be part of that community, it is also for the environment as well, but it's also for me because it feels nice when you feel like you belong in the area where you live. So, it's nice to have a community to be part of.

One aspect of this belonging is Alex's sense of growing food as a joint endeavour, as the cultivation of food involves several steps (figure 7.2). As such, whilst Alex may have

planted the seeds, someone else may then plant out the seedlings, with other members of the community enjoying the vegetables when harvested. The belonging participants co-create over their lifecourse echoes their initial experiences at nature-based interventions by providing ongoing opportunities for affective social support through engaging in shared interests. This belonging supports the participants' identity, provide protective factors against emotional distress, and promote a sense of self-value through positive contributions to other people's lives (Ellingsen-Dalskau et al., 2016; Howarth et al., 2021; Stevens et al., 2021).



Figure 7.2 Growing food as a community effort, which supports Alex's wellbeing (Photo: Alex)

Communities that provide affective environments contribute to a person's sense of being well through providing social interactions which empowers a person's trust in

their internal valuations. The development of this trust in self enables a person to continue to build up their knowledge of which experiences are nourishing, and which are diminishing. As such, as part of the participants' process of becoming they have continued to seek out communities that affectively supports their sense of self and actions, which enables their actualising tendency to flourish.

7.3.2 Reciprocal nature connection: health and care

As I noted in Chapter 5, the facilitators have a belief in nature as an affective characteristic in supporting human wellbeing and as such encourage participants to develop a connection to nature to support their wellbeing over their lifecourse.

[A]lso nature is there as well for you to belong and to feel supported in, that's a space that you now have to go to, if you were uncomfortable doing that before.
(Mhairi, Facilitator, Environmental Conservation and Ecotherapy)

Gittens et al.'s (2023) study of a woodland nature intervention, which included a three-month follow-up, proposed that participants' perceptions regarding belonging to natural spaces changed due to them (re)building confidence in natural spaces. This beneficial change was supported by participants' becoming mindful and curious of their surroundings, and their valuing of the sense of slowing down this provided. This practice provided participants with a (re)connection with nature, which is strengthened as they accumulate nature-based experiences. The participants' continuation of the activities becomes part of a virtuous circle that maintains and enhances their nature-connection. Several participants discussed beneficial changes to their nature connection. For example, Mike's participation in environmental conservation has influenced his pace of activity when he goes out on walks or runs (figure 7.3). Mike stated a preference for running on his own and at his own pace, so he can stop and take in the nature he notices, over running with a friend whose focus is on a fast pace, which Mike now finds less enjoyable.

I do think one of the bigger things is certainly noticing more stuff and moving from the macro to the micro type things in a way, partly because of building up a bit more knowledge of stuff and realising that the things that maybe I wasn't particularly bothered by before is suddenly like 'oh no why did you not care about this?' this is actually quite an interesting thing to see or quite a neat little thing to spot.



Figure 7.3 Mike and his practice of micro noticing whilst out running (Photo: Mike)

Mike's experience resonates with findings from Sahlin et al.'s (2014) 12-month follow-up study, suggesting that participants' experiential learning about nature during the activities supports them in valuing nature during their everyday activities, by enhancing their curiosity and enjoyment in noticing the nature around them. Several participants discussed slowing down in nature, with their walking practice changing upon entering a natural space. For example, Gary discussed passing through a threshold (figure 7.4), where he went from walking quickly and incuriously through an urban space to slowing down his pace, as he took notice of his surroundings, upon reaching a local green space.



Figure 7.4 Gary and his threshold (Photo: Gary)

Mike's and Gary's practices suggests being mindful with nature is restful, where they are able to relax and allow themselves time to enjoy being without having to 'do'. The participants' mindful practices have become long-term self-rewarding practices valued for the joy and respite they provide in contrast to previous occupations valued for their productivity (Eriksson et al., 2010; Pálsdóttir et al., 2014). Mindfulness in nature has been found to promote wellbeing, reduce stress, and provide respite, as well as reinforce a person's nature connection, which as it develops in-turn supports mindful noticing of nature (Huynh and Torquati, 2019; Mayer et al., 2009; Schutte and Malouff, 2018).

Meanwhile, for some of the participants, their connection with nature was considered as a way of being that reflected their sense of self, values, and actions. In these reciprocal relationships nature is more than a resource to support their own wellbeing. For example, Catherine discussed her own nature connection providing her with a sense of belonging with nature, which incidentally supports her wellbeing.

I want to care for nature. I want to make sure that we're not using nature in an unsustainable way, and I think maybe when I'm having these genuine moments of seeing the grebes go up and do their little dance and stuff, I think that's more like [it]. I don't think it's me getting something from nature, I think it's me being with nature, me being in nature, at one with nature. So, I don't think it's like 'oh it's helping my wellbeing blah blah blah', I think it's more a sense of oneness which you could say improves my wellbeing, but I feel like that's missing the point in a way.

Catherine's nature connection begun during her participation in wilderness therapy, which she has nurtured, but she also feels it is not as pure a connection as her wife's or friend's nature connection, due to finding nature challenging or wanting to listen to music whilst outdoors. Through these comparisons Catherine can doubt the value of her nature connection, which impacts on her sense of self and confidence with nature. However, Catherine describes a nature connection which is clearly significant to her wellbeing. Catherine's wellbeing is supported as in those moments, for instance with the grebes, she is fully present and not distorting the moment to fit any particular expectations or purpose, instead the moment unfolds and affects her as it is. This harmonious experiencing of life supports a person to develop trust in living each moment fully and away from defensive strategies when responding to situations. In essence these existential moments support a person's increasing organismic trust to rely on their own judgment, and away from potentially detrimental social norms, to respond appropriately to situations (Rogers, 1961). Responses to situations informed by a person's internal evaluations rather than external expectations reduce psychological tension and emotional distress (Rogers, 1959), which may explain Catherine's sense of wellbeing from being at one with nature.

Gill also discussed a reciprocal nature connection through her environmental conservation volunteering (figure 7.5), where she also experiences being present with nature in the moment. This occurs due to Gill having a sense of belonging to nature through engagements with nature that benefits nature and herself. As with Catherine, Gill's nature connection supports a sense of a meaningful life, which can positively influence wellbeing (Howell et al., 2011).

[W]hen I'm doing the conservation, I'm assisting nature and it's very spiritual as well I find ... you're not supposed to work on your own, but you work in pockets, so somebody else might be further away, so some people choose to work together and they're chattering away, but I really love that I don't feel alone. Do you see what I mean? When I'm cutting down trees or clearing scrub around the roots or whatever, I'm at one with nature in that situation and I just love it, absolutely love it. (Gill, Participant, Adventure Activities)

Participants' nature connection appears to influence mindful behaviours, which supports participants to engage with the moment as it is, providing respite, meaning and connection. Engaging without defensiveness can support participants' self-awareness and emotional regulation (Richardson, 2019), which as noted above can support a person to develop trust in their capabilities to respond appropriately to situations. This self-trust can reduce the participants' emotional distress as they are attending to their experience as it is rather than distorting it to fit detrimental behaviours or external conditions of worth (Rogers, 1961).



Figure 7.5 Gill and her environmental conservation volunteering, which provides her with spiritual fulfilment (Photo: Gill)

7.4 Disruptions: responding to COVID-19

Living authentically means to live intimately with those aspects of life that are painful and frightening as much as the joyful and satisfying experiences (Rogers, 1961). Consequently, a person's embracing of all that life is, is part of an ongoing process where personal or external challenges can disrupt a person's functioning or be met by a person with an openness, creativity, and freedom. The COVID-19 pandemic undisputedly disrupted all our lives through the implementation of lockdowns and restrictions to our daily lives, which impacted on people's mental and physical health, working arrangements, and leisure activities (Doughty et al., 2023; Nigg et al., 2023).

For many people engaging with nearby nature was a supportive practice that provided people with moments of respite, processing of thoughts and emotions, and connection (Doughty et al., 2023; Earl et al., 2022). Considering the COVID-19 pandemic as an example of a life disruption I explore the effect on participants' nature-based wellbeing practices, highlighting the resilience of participants' individualised practices and the detrimental impact on participants when they were unable to access specific places for their place-based practices. Finally, I locate participants' responses within their biography to contextualise how the long-term beneficial influence from participation at nature-based interventions is entangled in the participants' understanding of their self.

7.4.1 Adaptable: local green and blue havens

[N]ature is very important in the sense of my wellbeing, because it was also my escape from what was happening with the pandemic, 'cause I was getting to the point where I was so sick of watching or listening to the news, 'cause it was the same thing, slightly changed today, that I needed to get back to reality, in the sense of nature I was able to connect with that, whereas some people it was new to them which I thought was really quite special as well. (Daisy May, Participant, Environmental Conservation)

Several participants discussed how they engaged with outdoor spaces to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their wellbeing. As Daisy May highlights above, the participants were aware of nature as an affective place and/or entity to which they were connected to, which benefited their wellbeing. For example, Michael discussed his encounters with a place of solace, where he was alone with nature. This activity provided Michael with physical exercise, a source of food, and respite from the disruption of COVID-19. Michael lived in temporary accommodation which he shared, and he saw the other people struggling with the restrictions, which led to police incidents. As such, Michael's repeated nature encounters maintained his important relationship with nature, co-creating a therapeutic landscape that supported his mental health and sense of self.

[I]t's next to a woodland and farmland and I used to spend a lot of time out there just listening to the birds in the trees, just go and read a book ... I thought the allotment was a good place for me to go and do exercise, doing the weeding and doing the digging and harvesting the veg at the end of it. I just know that it's good, really satisfying.

Meanwhile, Jilly maintained her walking through her practice of a daily walk or cycle. The walks outside provided her with an opportunity to decompress from her work and connect to nature, whilst the cycle rides provided opportunities to have fun and to play (figure 7.6). Jilly felt able to be playful as she was the only person present with no one watching her “zigzag all over the place”. These moments provided Jilly with joy and a sense of freedom, during which she could be spontaneous and creative with her cycling. The participants’ regular beneficial encounters with nature echoes findings that suggest people’s encounters with blue and green spaces during COVID-19 provided them with opportunities to develop therapeutic landscape experiences which provided moments of joy, refuge, connection, self-reflection and a sense of freedom, during a time of uncertainty, social isolation and increased and new everyday stresses (Doughty et al., 2023; Earl et al., 2022; Nigg et al., 2023).



Figure 7.6 *Jilly and having fun on her bike (Photo: Jilly)*

This sense of finding joy during a difficult time was expressed by several participants. For example, Colleen shared her practice of capturing sunsets or sunrises (figure 7.7) as something for herself. Colleen had recently had a baby and was often tired throughout the day, as well as unable to go to the groups she had planned to join due to the lockdown restrictions. As such, Colleen's noticing of the changing colours of the sky supported her to get herself out of the house, even for a short while and connect with nature and her local space. This self-rewarding practice provided Colleen with an energy boost and a sense of joy, achievement, and gratitude for where she lived. Colleen noted she could have easily flopped out on the sofa instead, but recognised being constructive and connecting to the wider world supported her mental health. The development of daily activities that support a person to go outside and immerse themselves in the moment provides them with a chance to disconnect, cultivate joy and develop a deeper appreciation for their local area. This co-creates a place attachment facilitated by repeated sensory and emotional encounters, which can provide a buffer to effects of stressful events (Doughty et al., 2023; Jellard and Bell, 2021).



Figure 7.7 Colleen and making the most of the moment (Photo: Colleen)

The COVID-19 pandemic created unique personal challenges for people, depending on their situation. This resulted in several participants having to adapt to a new everyday. For example, Jaanki had been furloughed and found that loss of purpose difficult, especially as her partner continued to work from home. However, she did try different practices to support her wellbeing, including exploring her local area when walking her dog. Walking her dog provided Jaanki with a purpose and a structure as they were able to go out twice a day. This sense of purpose was accompanied by a curiosity to explore the local area (figure 7.8) which provided her with moments of calm, joy, and fascination, all supporting her to maintain her wellbeing during this difficult disruption to her life. This reconfiguring of her everyday led to new place encounters, which provided sensory and therapeutic experiences that facilitated a gratitude for her local area and eased some of her emotional distress (Doughty et al., 2023; Jellard and Bell, 2021)

[T]here was just loads of local places that we hadn't been to that we really started enjoying, and like our allotment is down by the river, so in the evenings

we would go down and do the watering and then have a quick pop down to the river and just the birds and the bird song ... the fact that we are surrounded by fields and orchards and woodland that's been really lovely. I don't think we would have coped without it.

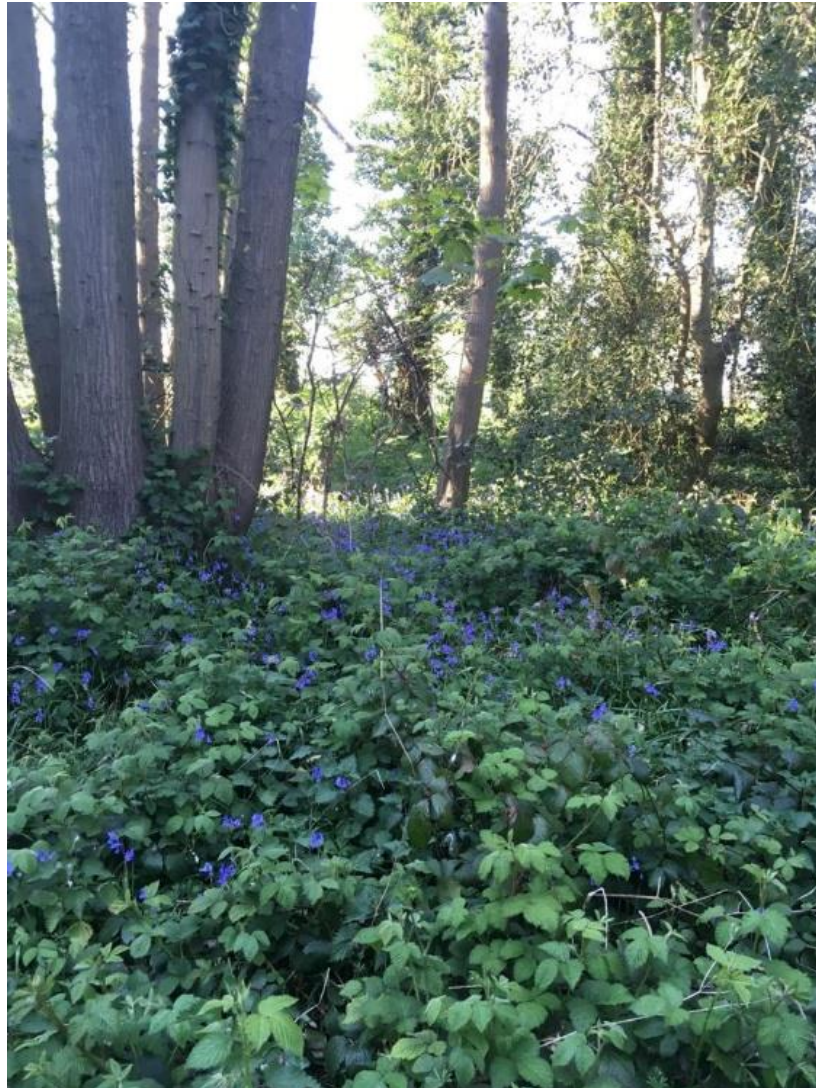


Figure 7.8 Jaanki's exploration of a local woodland (Photo: Jaanki)

Meanwhile, Daisy May had to move away from her preferred coastal environment due to the closure of universities and return home, which is inland. As discussed in Chapter 5, Daisy May was active during the COVID-19 pandemic in enhancing her nature connection and the subsequent wellbeing benefits she gained through this reciprocal connection. Whilst Daisy May missed the sensory experiences of the coastal air and waters, she maintained her sense of curiosity in exploring her local spaces (figure 7.9).

This curiosity led to her learning about trees and the water cycle, which enhanced her connection with the sea, providing a sense of achievement and meaning. This shift in Daisy May's nature encounters provided her with new sensory and reflective experiences which benefited her wellbeing, whilst also recognising her longing for her sense of home she had developed at coastal environments (Jellard and Bell, 2021).



Figure 7.9 Daisy May and adapting to her local area (Photo: Daisy May)

The majority of participants were able to support their wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated societal and personal challenges through evolving nature-based practices which provided them with repeatable therapeutic landscape experiences. As the participants had reconnected to their organismic valuing process during the nature-based intervention and continued to enhance their trust in their internal valuing process, they were aware of the types of activities and places which would support their mental health during stressful events. This included the participants' connection with nature, which supported the development of a deeper sensory and emotional connection with their nearby nature and opportunities to disconnect from the pandemic.

7.4.2 Difficulties: derailed connections and practices

Some of the participants reported difficulties with maintaining their nature-based practices due to personal challenges including shielding, fear of the uncertain effects of the virus, and loss of access to significant therapeutic landscapes. In the following vignette concerning Daniel, a participant of ecotherapy, I highlight the role of affective places in supporting a person's wellbeing, but also the detrimental impacts that occur when beneficial practices are closely associated with a third place (see Chapter 5) and are not transferred into a participants' everyday.

Daniel had a lonely childhood, especially after he moved primary school at nine years old. He found secondary school very difficult as he did not have any friends and hated being there. During high school his dad left, and Daniel only sees him occasionally. At college he had some counselling to support his mental health, which he found helpful for understanding himself, but also appreciated as it allowed him to get out of lessons. At twenty-one Daniel became a dad and he referred to the following three years as a 'living hell'. During this time, he and his partner split up and their child went into foster care before being adopted. Daniel was grieving for the loss of his child and received very little support to process his situation and feelings.

At twenty-three Daniel was referred by his GP to an ecotherapy forest garden for one year, which he attended for 1-2 days a week. Daniel chose to go to the forest garden as it was outdoors and practical. Daniel had enjoyed camping and going to forests with his parents when younger, and preferred learning through his hands. He found participating at the forest garden extremely helpful with dealing with his 'living hell'. At the forest garden Daniel found the social interactions with the facilitators and his fellow participants supportive, which improved his confidence in social settings. He also enjoyed being able to be practical and appreciated being needed and useful to others and the garden. During his time at the forest garden the

facilitators encouraged Daniel to deliver a couple of workshops on bushcraft skills, from which he received positive feedback and gained a sense of achievement. Overall, he found participating provided him with a sense of purpose and reduced the overwhelm he felt due to his situation, providing him with him a clearer mind.

Daniel found the transition from the forest garden difficult, especially as it coincided with his child being adopted. Daniel became depressed with his grief and missed the support and sense of purpose he had at the forest garden. However, Daniel's participation at the forest garden appears to have set a beneficial process in motivation, regarding how Daniel maintains and enhances his mental wellbeing, as well as his future. Whilst it is unclear how, Daniel ended up engaging with the Princess Trust, which provided him with some emotional and social support and around a year after finishing at the forest garden he started volunteering at a farm. He enjoys working with and caring for the animals, which he finds soothing and calming. Daniel also enjoys working with other people and being part of a team, in which he is a trusted member. Daniel is considering asking to become involved in facilitating the other activities the farm offer and would like a farm-based apprenticeship, so he can develop a fulfilling career for himself. He recognises he still has his 'demons', but that he is also doing better too and finding more helpful ways of dealing with difficult emotions, for example, when he is angry, he tries and go for a walk and take in what is around him, rather than expressing his anger via punching a wall.

Daniel found the COVID-19 pandemic difficult to adapt to as he missed participating at the farm, a space where he is comfortable, appreciated, and productive. Whilst he enjoys the outdoors he struggled to go out for walks or to be in his own garden, as he felt lonely and often found it difficult to complete larger gardening tasks on his own (e.g., fencing). On occasion, Daniel noted being in the garden and completing some simple tasks, such as weeding, helpful and provided respite. When he was allowed to return to

the farm due to being a volunteer this helped him as he enjoyed being useful, which supported his shaky self-confidence.

For Daniel, his wellbeing is tied to specific places, where he is supported by the affective relations present and his sense of belonging, which co-creates a therapeutic environment. However, away from these affective places Daniel finds it hard to engage with the outdoors through solo practices to support his mental wellbeing. Kaley et al., (2019) proposes that some participants face particular socioenvironmental barriers that reduce the transformative potential of their encounters at nature-based interventions. Considering Daniel's life history, it appears that he does not benefit from similar affective relations at home, and that the third places he has encountered provide an alternative relational experience. These relationships appear to have supported Daniel to connect with his organismic valuing process, though developing trust in his internal valuations, but the social mediation of his longer-term relationships appear to counter this developing confidence in himself (Mearns and Thorne, 2007). As such, during times when his access to affective places and relations is cut off, including the pandemic, he appears to struggle to stay connected with his fragile sense of worth, as he is still in process regarding valuing himself as someone who is capable of encountering existence as it is and being able to respond in ways which would support his wellbeing (Rogers, 1961).

Emma also recounted the importance of the city farm, as a third place, to her in terms of providing the resources she requires to regulate and process her emotions and thoughts.

[I]t doesn't change what I would do, but it changes whether I could do it.

The weekend before the UK national lockdown, Emma visited the city farm to talk to fellow volunteers and be with the animals, which soothed her emotional distress. However, after the farm closed Emma did not have access to an important social (human and other-than-human) support network, which made it more difficult for Emma to process her stresses. Emma managed to adapt and maintain her wellbeing,

though being active in her parent's garden, but found connecting to her friends from the farm more difficult by phone than in-person and missed being able to be with a range of animals, which she has an emotional connection to.

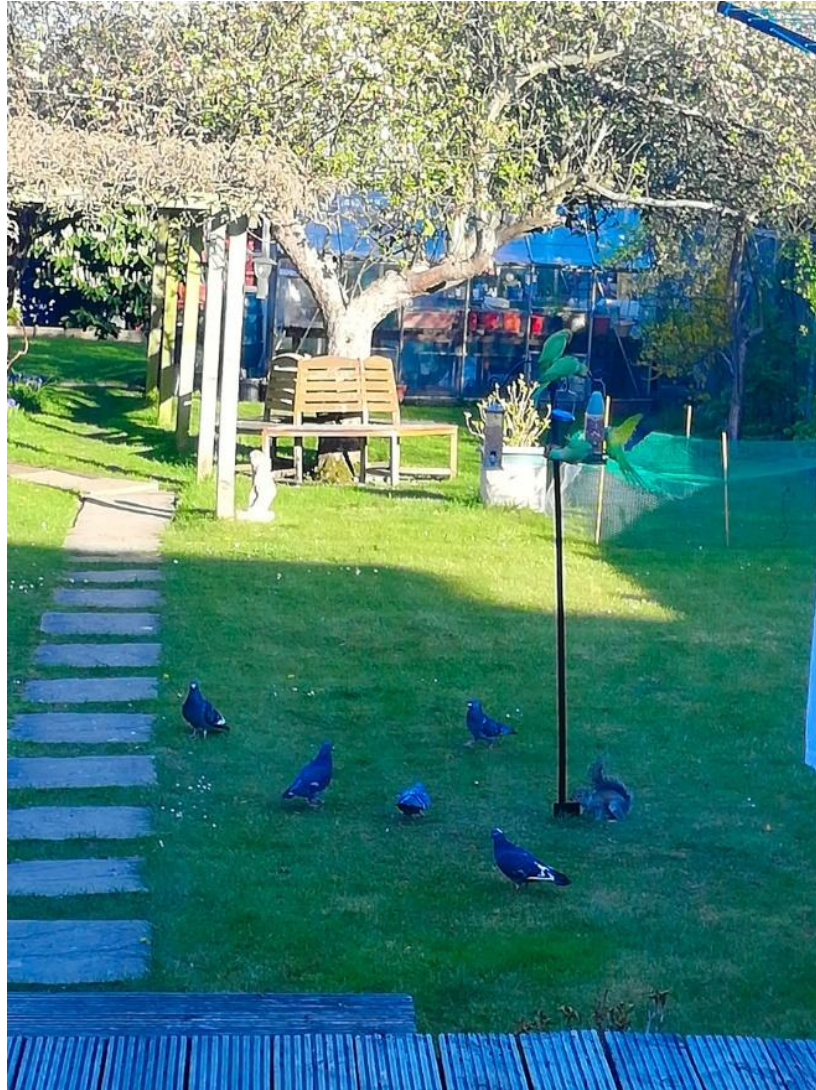


Figure 7.10 Tomasz and finding some respite in his garden (Photo: Tomasz)

Meanwhile for Tomasz his challenge was that he was required to shield due to a long-term health condition. As such, Tomasz experienced a loss of independence, further exacerbated by the suspension of the environmental conservation group he belonged to. Tomasz's life shrunk as he become confined to the family home, spending a lot of time in his room, however he was also supported by his parents to engage with the garden and his hobby of bird watching (figure 7.10). In the garden, Tomasz was able to show and share with his dad the skills and knowledge he had developed at the

environmental conservation group. This provided Tomasz with a sense of achievement, whilst gardening on his own provided him with a sense of space, respite from the news regarding the pandemic, and emotional regulation (Doughty et al., 2023).

[G]etting fresh air, clearing your mind of stuff if you've had a bad day because you've been at home, because it's been raining too much and the next day is sunny, it is good to get out there and clear your mind from being at home and getting away from my parents a bit instead of being under the one roof.

Subsequently, for Tomasz not having access to his regular affective places was mitigated by the affective relationship he has with his parents. However, his autonomy was affected, as was the range of social interactions he had access to, which left him isolated and missing his friends at the environmental conservation group.

Third places are clearly valuable resources, which provide affective relationships that support participants' wellbeing. The above participants demonstrate an attachment to specific third places, which are affective for their wellbeing, however, when a person's wellbeing practices become embedded in a particular space, rather than mobile they are subject to disruption during stressful events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. For these participants, their ability to adapt their practices depended on the socioenvironmental networks they are part of. Subsequently, whilst the participants' have developed a sense of worth and trust in their internal locus of evaluation, knowing what activities and experiences nourish them, they appear more susceptible to not being able to follow their own judgement due to their personal circumstances and relationships. As such, this means these participants may have experienced a greater level of emotional distress and their sense of becoming thwarted by the pandemic.

7.5 Conclusion

I have demonstrated that participants' process of becoming is positively influenced by their participation at nature-based interventions. By drawing attention to the beneficial

long-term effects of participating at a nature-based intervention I develop our understanding of nature-based interventions as a therapeutic landscape that provides more-than respite from emotional distress, but are enabling and transformative spaces where long-term improvements to a person's being and belonging occur. This occurs due to the affective interactions involving facilitators and participants co-creating a psychosocial environment, which is non-judgemental, empathic, authentic, and trusting (discussed in Chapter 6). Within this therapeutic environment, participants' self-expression and choices are supported, which enables participants to reconnect to their organismic valuing process and develop trust and confidence in themselves. This self-trust and self-confidence support the participants' valuing of their self and recognition that they are worthy, supporting an authentic sense of self, values, and actions. The participants demonstrated this self-worth through the study and career choices they subsequently made, which influenced the development of meaningful and purposeful work. The participants valuing of themselves was also present in supporting the decisions they made regarding supporting their emotional regulation and processing and engaging in meaningful extraordinary and everyday activities, which provides a sense of a meaningful existence.

The process of becoming also involves developing belonging. At the nature-based interventions participants experience a sense of belonging due to experiencing being valued, respected, and supported, as well as by developing connections with fellow participants through the activities on offer. The participants' sense of belonging is a significant factor in enhancing their wellbeing during their participation, due to the relational environment supporting the participants actualising tendency, meaning they move towards flourishing. As such, participants join groups and/or communities across their lifecourse that provide the same affective relational qualities, as they recognise these therapeutic environments support their sense of self and being well.

Subsequently, group or place-based activities become a valued aspect and a part of the participants' sense of self. The other aspect of belonging that occurs at nature-based interventions is the participants' (re)connection with nature. This connection with nature provides participants with a long-term nurturing relationship for their own self-

care through mindful practices with nature, as well as a sense of meaning and purpose through caring for nature.

The process of becoming will encounter challenges across a person's lifecourse, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic. All the participants had developed practices that supported their long-term wellbeing, for the majority these practices were mobile and adaptable, for a few of the participants these practices were embedded in particular third places. The participants with mobile wellbeing practices were able to respond to the restrictions and stressors of the pandemic through continuing or adapting their practices, which mitigated some of the emotional distress during this uncertain time. However, for those participants whose practices were connected with a third place, due to the restrictions, they become disconnected to their affective places. The impact of this disconnection depended on the wider socioenvironmental networks the participants were part of, suggesting that transformational experiences do occur at nature-based interventions, but the continuation of that beneficial change depends on if the other relationships participants are part of support or thwarts their sense of self and wellbeing.

Chapter 8 Conclusions: Towards unlocking the black box

... I have been welcomed into other people's worlds and it has been a privilege to hear and be trusted with their stories. Stories of becoming a unique person. I grounded myself in those stories and gently teased out the care, nature-connectedness, affective relationships, and personal growth I saw in them. ... A sight influenced by my own lived experiences of being human, and specifically a psychotherapist, a nature-lover, and now a researcher. ... I hope I have honoured their stories and through them offer further understandings of nature-based interventions. ...

8.1 Introduction

Through engaging in an interdisciplinary approach involving health and wellbeing geography and person-centred psychotherapy I have embedded my thesis in a relational approach to understanding the proposed psychosocial processes at nature-based interventions (Fernee et al., 2021). As such, I have drawn attention to the significance of critically understanding the intra- and interpersonal relational dynamics at nature-based interventions in influencing participants' long-term wellbeing. Specifically, how facilitators and participants co-create affective environments that enable participants to experience transformations to their sense of self and their long-term wellbeing. Through situating participants' and facilitators' experiences in their ongoing biography I have highlighted the role of their motivation, intentions, nature-connectedness, and personal qualities in influencing affective psychosocial processes at nature-based interventions. As such, I have recognised the generative capabilities of facilitators and participants at nature-based interventions and highlighted them as significant actants in affecting transformational experiences for participants. Thus, I have demonstrated the value of exploring the situated experiences of facilitators and participants to contextualise the short- and long-term significance of interpersonal dynamics in enabling place encounters.

Through the example of nature-based interventions I have also enhanced our theoretical understanding of therapeutic landscapes, specifically the role of intra- and

interpersonal relational dynamics in co-creating affective therapeutic landscape experiences. I have drawn on person-centred psychotherapy to enhance our understanding of firstly, the relational self, by providing a relational and growth-oriented view of a person. Secondly, by drawing attention to why and how relationships are involved in providing people with affective sanctuary and transformational encounters at third places. As such, I highlight the agency of the people involved in therapeutic landscape experiences. Through considering a relational and growth-oriented image of a person I also provide firstly, a process for understanding how therapeutic landscape experiences can have long-term influences after and outside the original therapeutic event. Secondly, this process can be used to explore and account for the influence of people's wider socio-environment networks on enhancing or thwarting their therapeutic landscape experiences and long-term wellbeing.

Next, I outline how through answering my research questions I have contributed to the existing empirical and theoretical knowledge, and methodological approaches within health and wellbeing geography. I also consider how my thesis contributes to and enriches our understandings of nature-based interventions and practices. As a reminder, my research questions were:

1. How do participants and facilitators' backgrounds, motivations, and intentions influence young people's experiences at nature-based interventions?
2. What personal and relational qualities are involved in co-creating affective psychosocial processes at nature-based interventions?
3. How do the above factors influence the longevity of beneficial effects on young people's mental wellbeing from participating at a nature-based intervention?

I finish by considering the impact of my contribution on policy and practice for nature-based interventions and a future research agenda.

8.2 Research Overview

Through my research I sought to explore, firstly, the long-term effects on participants' wellbeing from participating at nature-based interventions. Secondly, the role of personal and relational qualities in the formation of affective psychosocial processes and spaces at nature-based interventions. I focused on the facilitators' and participants' situated lived experiences of nature-based interventions to contextualise their interactions and the influence of these on participants' long-term wellbeing. Through this, I demonstrated that participants and facilitators are influential in co-creating therapeutic psychosocial environments that have the potential to be transformative for participants. As such, I have responded to calls regarding, firstly, understanding if these changes are consistent across the range of nature-based interventions in facilitating beneficial changes for participants (Stigsdotter et al., 2018). Secondly, the process(es) involved in influencing affective changes to participants' wellbeing and the maintenance of these changes (Fernee et al., 2021; Harper et al., 2007; Hawkins et al., 2016; Pálsdóttir et al., 2014; Stigsdotter et al., 2018). Through responding to these calls, I have also established that there are long-term benefits to participants' wellbeing from participating at nature-based interventions. Consequently, I have expanded our understanding of affective encounters in health geography through drawing attention firstly, to the intra- and interpersonal relational dynamics involved, and secondly, the long-term influences of affective encounters on people's sense of self and wellbeing (Bell et al., 2018; Wiles, 2023)

My approach to exploring and understanding the longevity of benefits to participants' wellbeing moved away from considering nature-based interventions as a set of affective characteristics to focusing on what occurs between facilitators and participants, as well as amongst participants. This focus not only drew attention to the transformational potential of nature-based interventions, but also the relational processes in the co-creation of affective change and the maintaining and enhancing of it during participants' lifecourse. Subsequently, I move away from conceptualisations of nature-based interventions as therapeutic through providing a third place for care, occupation, and social respite (Sempik and Bragg, 2013) towards conceptualising them

as therapeutic through offering co-created transformational spaces that have long-term effects on participants' quality of life.

I located my study of nature-based interventions within health geography and person-centred psychotherapy. As, I was keen to turn the focus onto the forgotten people involved at nature-based interventions. The people involved in third places have the potential to mediate theirs and other people's experiences through their interactions (Conradson, 2003; Moriggi et al., 2020; Muir and McGrath, 2018). This geographical understanding is supplemented by psychotherapeutic research into therapeutic encounters that has highlighted the significance of the therapist, client, and relational processes involved in therapeutic relationships (Bohart and Tallman, 2010; Hubble et al., 2010; Norcross, 2010). Subsequently, I was keen to unpack the intra- and interpersonal relational processes involved at nature-based interventions to understand the role of people in affective therapeutic landscape experiences. I next discuss how through unpacking the relational dynamics I have enhanced our understanding of nature-based interventions and therapeutic landscape experiences.

8.2.1 Situating facilitators' and participants' encounters at nature-based interventions

In my first empirical chapter I began to understand the roles of facilitators and participants at nature-based interventions by contextualising their engagements within their biographies to answer to my first research question:

How do participants and facilitators' backgrounds, motivations, and intentions influence young people's experiences at nature-based interventions?

The aim of situating the participants' and facilitators' lived experiences was to understand the influence of their backgrounds and intentions on participants' experiences at nature-based interventions. Through this, I attended to the research gap regarding the role of facilitators and participants at nature-based interventions.

Firstly, by considering ‘who’ facilitators are and the influence of their backgrounds and values on their approach, I highlighted two common factors amongst facilitators of a range of nature-based interventions. These two factors were: a care-informed approach; and their belief in nature-connectedness, which developed through the facilitators’ unique lived experiences. The facilitators’ care for participants and nature enriched the activities, through drawing participants’ attention to the practice and wellbeing effects of the activities on people and nature (Moriggi et al., 2020; Murray et al., 2019). This approach facilitated participants’ developing awareness of the effects on themselves, which supported long-term beneficial changes to their practices and habits, including reconnecting or enhancing their relationship with nature (Liu et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2020).

Secondly, through situating participants’ experiences of nature-based interventions, I highlighted that participants are agentic in co-creating their therapeutic landscape experiences, rather than passive recipients of nature-based interventions. Participants demonstrate this agency through choosing to participate based on their short- and long-term intentions to improve their current situation and sense of self (Husk et al., 2020; Popay et al., 2007). Recognising and valuing participants’ lived experience also highlighted that participants’ childhood nature encounters provided a formative relationship with nature, which underpinned the participants’ belief in nature as an affective actant and space that can help them (Asah et al., 2012; Trangsrud et al., 2022).

Thirdly, nature-based interventions are a third place, where participants’ self-expression is accepted and supported. This was especially significant for participants who experienced being marginalized in their everyday environments at home and/or school. The caring and supportive relationships facilitators’ offered participants, as well as the affective peer support, influenced participants’ sense of self (Mearns and Cooper, 2018; Parry and Glover, 2010). This occurred as participants were able to make their own choices without being judged and had space in which to explore which activities they enjoyed and what aspects of these helped support their wellbeing. This enabled participants to realise their intentions and venture, in proactive ways, beyond

the constraints involved in their everyday circumstances (Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Rogers, 1961).

Through situating participants' and facilitators' experiences I draw further attention towards the value of third places for people experiencing difficult life circumstances and/or as an affective place for self-expression and moving towards an authentic sense of self. I also highlight that participants are agentic in their interactions at and with third places and co-create the beneficial short- and long-term affects to their wellbeing. Subsequently, I propose that third places can offer more than affective sanctuary and non-threatening sociability for people, through recognising and facilitating a person's intentions and/or the changes they wish to make.

Finally, in this chapter I recognise the significance of contextualising people's experiences in their ongoing biography as a fundamental aspect of understanding therapeutic landscape experiences. This recognition was underpinned by using life maps with participants, which highlighted flows and connections between events and participants' identity and wellbeing. Utilising this creative and empowering method supported participants to share in-depth their lived experience and the actants, events, and relationships involved in initialising and sustaining therapeutic landscape experiences (Hall, 2019; Worth, 2011).

8.2.2 The co-creation of affective interpersonal relationships at nature-based interventions

In the second empirical chapter I turned my attention to the relational dynamics between facilitators and participants, and between participants to answer my second research question:

What personal and relational qualities are involved in co-creating affective psychosocial processes at nature-based interventions?

I had partially answered my second research question through recognising the facilitators care and the participants agency as two factors involved in co-creating affective encounters. Through this chapter I demonstrated four further personal qualities that are common amongst the facilitators and further build on the significance of recognising participants as generative. In this chapter I respond specifically to Harper's (2009) call to consider the qualities and skills involved in affective therapeutic relationships. By doing so I develop Fernee et al.'s (2021) proposal of a psychosocial process being involved in facilitating developments in participants' sense of self. Through drawing on person-centred psychotherapy, I provide a relational and growth-oriented view of the person that can explain a person's personal growth and the role of relationships in this process.

I highlighted that the personal qualities of non-judgemental acceptance, empathic understanding, genuineness, and trust are significant in forming affective therapeutic encounters at nature-based interventions. These personal qualities underpin the facilitators' flexible approach towards participants' intentions and participation, which influenced the co-creation of an accepting and supportive environment (Harrod et al., 2023). Within this affective environment, the participants' perception of these personal qualities facilitates their self-expression, self-awareness, and the development of trust in their choices and actions (Kogstad et al., 2014; Mearns and Thorne, 2007; Murray et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the participants are also active members of peer groups, which are accepting and supportive of each other, contributing to the formation of enabling environments at nature-based interventions (Harris, 2017; Muir and McGrath, 2018).

Through drawing on person-centred psychotherapy, I provided a process which explains how affective therapeutic environments facilitates people's reconnection to their own judgements as a guide for their choices and actions. As a person's actions more closely align with their experience of events and relationships, this reduces their emotional distress and improves their sense of being well (Rogers, 1961). The effects of changes to participants' sense of self included improved self-confidence, self-worth, and sense of belonging. This process can create shifts in a participants' sense of self, which can enable the flow of benefits from a nature-based intervention into the

participants' daily lives (Harrod et al., 2023). As such, firstly, I highlight the significance of the generative capabilities of the people involved in the therapeutic encounters. Secondly, I provide an in-depth understanding for why relationships facilitate or hinder people's agency and potential. Consequently, I also draw attention to how therapeutic landscape experiences can have long-term therapeutic effects and be supported or disrupted by a person's everyday relationships. As such, I develop Kaley et al.'s (2019) proposal of considering the role of people's wider socio-environmental network, through providing a theoretical framework in which to explore and explain the influence of people's dynamic relationships.

8.2.3 Being and belonging across the lifecourse

In my final empirical chapter, I focused on the long-term effects of participants' participation at nature-based interventions to answer my third research question:

How do the above factors influence the longevity of beneficial effects on young people's mental wellbeing from participating at a nature-based intervention?

The aim was to develop empirical evidence for the longevity of beneficial influences to participants' wellbeing from participation and the intra- and interpersonal factors involved in maintaining and enhancing these affective changes. As such through answering my research question I respond to these two gaps in the research regarding nature-based interventions.

I demonstrated affects to participants' long-term wellbeing by considering wellbeing as a dynamic and relational process of becoming a person, which involves a person moving toward a congruent sense of self and sense of belonging. Participants maintain and enhance the beneficial changes to their wellbeing through their personal and community-based choices and actions. I first outline the long-term changes to their sense of self. Firstly, participants' improved sense of self continues through participants maintaining and enhancing the practices they developed at nature-based interventions for their emotional regulation and processing. Secondly, participants'

study and career choices are inspired by their participation, which influences the development of meaningful and purposeful work. Thirdly, participants become involved in meaningful extraordinary and everyday activities, which provides a sense of a meaningful existence.

Participants experience of affective environments at nature-based interventions fostered a sense of belonging (Bishop and Purcell, 2013; de St Croix and Doherty, 2023). Participants continue to seek out and encounter similar affective environments through joining groups and/or communities across their lifecourse. Through spending time with likeminded and warm people participants supported their sense of self and wellbeing, as well as enjoyed giving back to others and their local community (Ellingsen-Dalskau et al., 2016; Howarth et al., 2021). Participants also experienced belonging through their connection with nature. This relationship provides participants with a long-term nourishing relationship for their own self-care through mindful practices with nature, as well as a sense of meaning and purpose through caring for nature (Eriksson et al., 2010; Howell et al., 2011).

I also demonstrated in this chapter that these long-term effects can be maintained during disruptions (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic) when participants' practices were mobile and adaptable. The participants with mobile wellbeing practices were able to respond to the restrictions and stressors of the pandemic through continuing or adapting their practices, which mitigated some of the emotional distress during this uncertain time (Doughty et al., 2023; Jellard and Bell, 2021). However, some participants' practices were embedded with a third place, which they were unable to access during periods of the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of this disconnection depended on the participants' everyday relationships. Consequently, this suggests that whilst participating at nature-based interventions can have transformational effects, participants' everyday relationships also exert supportive or detrimental influences, which affect the maintenance and enhancement of these effects (Kaley et al., 2019).

This chapter adds further weight to the transformative possibilities of people's therapeutic landscape experiences and the factors involved in transferring these

benefits into their everyday. Through recognising the generative capabilities of people to co-create, sustain, and enhance improvements to their wellbeing; and the importance of people's relationships in facilitating or thwarting this process. These insights were supported by the use of creative methods. The importance of life mapping when considering long-term effects are brought to the fore as a significant approach in encouraging participants to reflect and discuss deeply their experiences in order to situate particular events and the influences of these events on their later life (Worth and Hardill, 2015). Meanwhile, the photography activity also enabled participants to choose and discuss, through their eyes, the places which support their wellbeing and the factors involved (Johnsen et al., 2008; Prins, 2012). Finally, through the participants completing these activities remotely, my influence, as the researcher, was minimised, which empowered participants to complete the activities their way and choose the stories they told through them. As such, remote approaches have value not only during times of restricted social contact, but as an important part of facilitating research grounded in participants lived experience.

8.4 Strengths and limitations

As I have demonstrated I have made significant contributions to our understandings of nature-based interventions and the concept of therapeutic landscapes. Through undertaking an interdisciplinary approach I was able to answer several calls regarding the processes involved in influencing beneficial changes to participants' wellbeing and the longevity of these benefits (Pálsdóttir et al., 2014; Stigsdotter et al., 2018). I also responded to calls in health and wellbeing geography to consider long-term therapeutic effects from people-place encounters (Bell et al., 2018; Espeso, 2022). In responding to these calls, I drew attention to the intra- and interpersonal relational dynamics involved in co-creating transformational places. This was complemented by enhancing our understanding of the relational self, utilised in the concept of therapeutic landscapes, through providing a relational and growth-oriented image of a person from person-centred psychotherapy. This concept of a person highlights the generative capabilities of people through recognising their tendency to actualise and capacity to self-heal when this tendency has been thwarted.

Through undertaking a remote and creative qualitative approach, underpinned by phenomenology I also contribute to the recognition of the importance of grounding research in participants' lived experiences (Worth and Hardill, 2015). As I have recognised utilising remote creative activities removed my gaze and influence as the researcher from the activity, empowering participants to interpret and undertake the activities at their own pace and in their own style. Through participants taking charge of the activities and then the discussion in the interviews meant the conversation stayed rooted in their lived experiences, with them deciding how they represented and shared significant experiences. My experience as a person-centred psychotherapist in facilitating accepting, warm, and non-threatening spaces supported participants to share at their pace and in their way, which fostered trust. Through this trust, participants shared further details about their experiences, which enriched the data produced and the insights into the long-term influences from participating at nature-based interventions.

However, as with all research there were also limitations to my study. Undertaking the research during a pandemic did affect my fieldwork and the data production. The unprecedented and challenging time may have been a barrier for participants to take part due to the furlough scheme (GOV.UK, 2020) and demands on their time due to working at home arrangements and/or increased caring responsibilities. Remote research, whilst having benefits, may have also excluded people due to requiring digital skills and digital poverty (Engward et al., 2022). Recruiting participants through gateway organisations was an effective approach, though not all former participants may have stayed in contact with the organisation and ensured their details remained updated. Participants were self-selecting and may have chosen to be involved due to the significance of their experiences on their lives. For example, several facilitators and participants who took part noted they were keen to, due to their passion for and belief in nature-based interventions.

'I just want more recognition for it, maybe that's what your research will do.'

(Mhairi, Facilitator)

'One of the reasons I wanted to do it as a participant and not as a facilitator was to be a bit more forthcoming ... because I work in the sector, and I know how important it is and really wanted to give you like bloody tonnes. I wanted to give you as much as possible. I kinda felt if I'm doing this I wanna do it wholeheartedly.' (Jaanki, Participant)

As such, the breadth of participants' experiences may not be fully captured, for example, participants who dropped out early, or did not benefit from participating at a nature-based intervention. Being able to capture participants with alternative experiences could provide further insight into the role of intra- and interpersonal relational dynamics, personal motivations and intentions, and nature-connectedness in therapeutic landscape experiences.

8.5 Implications for policy and practice

To support people to become their unique self requires interventions that support people to experience themselves as capable of making sense of their situation, through the formation of understanding and valued relationships, and support them in choosing their next steps (Warner, 2018). Nature-based interventions are examples of such interventions, where participants are not 'labelled', but accepted as they are and are free to choose how they participate and the directions they take (Muir and McGrath, 2018; Steigen et al., 2022; Trangsrud et al., 2022). Nature-based interventions are being incorporated into social green prescribing. The research supporting social green prescribing often implies there is an inherent benefit to being exposed to nature for psychological wellbeing (e.g., Mughal et al., 2022). This is often stated as natural environments being intrinsically therapeutic (e.g., Defra, 2018). Meanwhile, social prescribing can also shift responsibility onto the facilitators of nature-based interventions to be sufficiently skilled in providing therapeutic environments and the participants to self-manage their health (Calderón-Larrañaga et al., 2022).

I agree that the natural environment does play an important role, as highlighted by my focus on the role of nature connectedness at nature-based interventions in supporting participant's short- and long-term wellbeing. However, this nature connectedness is firstly supported by participants' formative connection with nature developed during their childhood, which acts as a motivating factor to connect with a nature-based intervention as nature is perceived as an affective actant to engage with for their wellbeing. Secondly, by facilitators encouraging participants to connect with nature through the activities: by taking notice of their encounters with nature; through learning about the nature present; and encouraging respect and care for nature. As such, nature's role is mediated by the facilitators' and participant's lived experiences, values, and actions. My thesis has also recognised the significance of the facilitators and participants involvement in co-creating affective psychosocial environments and long-term therapeutic benefits (Harrod et al., 2023). Subsequently, I provide the following considerations for nature-based interventions practice and policy, which focus on the role of facilitators and participants, to further enhance the role of social green prescribing in supporting people's mental wellbeing.

Firstly, it is important that facilitators are skilled in co-creating affective relationships with participants and have opportunities to develop these skills. The recognition of facilitators requiring these interpersonal skills is already in place, as job adverts request applicants to be able to communicate and develop strong relationships with participants (TCV, 2023b; The Wildlife Trust, 2023). However, to develop best practice it is vital that training is provided to develop and enhance these interpersonal skills, for example, a training programme informed by person-centred psychotherapy. Two of the facilitators of a national organisation recognised their indebtedness to receiving ecopsychology training in supporting their facilitation of activities to support mental wellbeing. Meanwhile, Totton (2021) recognises that there is already an established range of psychotherapeutic work which engages with nature, including the specific therapeutic practices of Ecotherapy and Nature Therapy (Berger and McLeod, 2006; Buzzell and Chalquist, 2009). As such, psychotherapists could offer nature-based interventions a range of courses including developing relational skills, understanding personal growth, and how engaging with nature can be beneficial for people. Having

evidence-based informed training schemes may also further establish the credentials of nature-based interventions as a suitable therapeutic intervention for people with psychological distress and/or wishing to explore and enhance their sense of self. For facilitators this can also provide a framework for their caring and nature connectedness approaches, which may further enhance their facilitation and in-turn the participants' experience. However, the development and delivery of training schemes would require additional funding, which requires increased investment in social green prescribing, especially for the delivery of schemes, which currently receives very little funding from health system funds (Garside et al., 2020; Polley et al., 2020).

Secondly, that participants are recognised as generative and therefore are not passive participants. This recognition not only shifts the discourse regarding the actants and processes involved in effective nature-based interventions, but could also help participants to recognise their own self-worth. For example, social prescribing is a personalised care approach that encourages people to take charge of their own health (NHS, 2017). This involves a link worker, working with the person to ascertain and connect them to relevant community activities, which the person has identified as being important to them (Howarth et al., 2020). These conversations could focus on not only what support the person requires, but what they can offer too by getting involved in community activities and groups.

Thirdly, through understanding the influence of the relational dynamics present, the prescribing of nature-based activities deserves to be understood as not only providing respite from psychological distress, but as potential spaces that co-create long-term improvements to a person's being and belonging. This links to the discourse that nature is inherently beneficial for people, but it is not about passive encounters with nature, but through a person developing their own nature connection informed by their embodied, relational, and sensory experiences with nature (Richardson, 2023). As such, social green prescribing policy needs to recognise the involvement of psychosocial processes, alongside the affective characteristics, in developing and providing effective nature-based interventions.

Fourthly, there needs to be a move away from nature-based interventions relying on third party funders and on funding that encourages short-termism and innovation (Garside et al., 2020). For a key factor in effective nature-based interventions is the co-creation of an affective psychosocial environment which involves two constant (if changing) actants, namely, the facilitator(s) and participants. As such, having consistent and long-term funding from health system funds could support nature-based interventions to focus on developing capacity and scaling up good practice.

Informed by the findings of my thesis and the above considerations, I propose the following recommendations for social green prescribing:

- The development of a toolkit that informs nature-based intervention practice. This could include: a training module for organisations and practitioners focused on developing interpersonal skills that informs co-creating affective and mindful therapeutic spaces; best practice guidance to support therapeutic and nature connectedness informed practice; and outcome measures to support evaluating nature-based interventions and provide evidence for funding bids.
- Guidance for Integrated Care Boards (who commission public health services) and link workers focused on explaining: the spectrum of experiences nature-based interventions can offer participants from short-term respite, to recovery, to long-term transformations; the role of relational dynamics between facilitators and participants; the role of peer support groups; and participants generative capacity towards change.
- Long-term prescribing of nature-based interventions for participants, of up to 12-18 months, with regular progress meetings to support participants' engagement, personal development, and effective transitions to other activities and/or schemes.
- Long-term funding to support organisations in the development of capacity building, the scaling up good practice, and providing long-term placements for participants.

8.6 Creating a research agenda

I have demonstrated the significance of the intra- and interpersonal relational dynamics between people at effective nature-based interventions. As such, I have highlighted the long-term influences of therapeutic landscape experiences on people's sense of self and the maintenance and enhancement of their wellbeing. I undertook an interdisciplinary approach to create a theoretical framework that enhances our understanding of the nature of a person and the relational processes involved in facilitated therapeutic encounters. My interdisciplinary approach also recognised and valued the importance of situating facilitators and participants' experiences within their biographies to contextualise the processes and affects involved in therapeutic landscape experiences. I hope this will inspire fellow researchers to continue this focus.

To further understand how interpersonal relationships influence participants' wellbeing at nature-based interventions requires in-person methods. For example, fieldwork involving participant observation and/or auto-ethnography could provide the researcher(s) with a rich understanding of group dynamics. Participants could supplement this understanding via completing diaries, providing contextual accounts of their experiences over time (Latham, 2016). Mobile interviews with participants could be informed by the above and draw out the relational dynamics experienced in-situ and the influence of these on participants' sense of self (Finlay and Bowman, 2017). Finally, video-ethnography as employed by Kaley et al. (2019) highlights the value of recording participants' engagement, which supports participant observation and can aid participants with providing richer responses regarding their social interactions. Further findings may advance understanding: of how facilitated encounters influence people's therapeutic experiences; why particular relational characteristics are valued in the formation of therapeutic landscapes; and how beneficial changes are maintained or hindered.

At nature-based interventions I have also recognised the importance of nature-connectedness, and future research could consider this relationship through my

person-centred therapeutic landscapes framework. As I have critically discussed nature is considered a key actant at nature-based interventions, which facilitate participants to feel safe and at ease (Cacciatore et al., 2020; Pálsdóttir et al., 2018). Birch et al.'s (2020) research reported young people as experiencing natural places as congruent, non-judgemental, and understanding, which supported their self-expression, sense of self and belonging with people and nature. Roger's (1957; 1959) theory provides an explanation for why these encounters are affective. Further research into the perceived and experienced therapeutic qualities of nature could provide further insights into the role of nature-connectedness in facilitating affective psychosocial environments and supporting participants' sense of self, emotional regulation and processing, and sense of belonging.

Finally, the significance of the intra- and interpersonal relational dynamics needs to be considered in relation to the range of demographic and structural variables, including age, class, ethnicity, gender, race, and sexuality. In order to ascertain if and how these intersections impact on participants' encounters and subsequent long-term wellbeing. This is especially pertinent considering the decolonial-turn in psychotherapy in addressing the accessibility, availability, and suitability of therapeutic interventions due to its dominance by Eurocentric paradigms of modernity, which suppresses other cultures, indigenous knowledge, and excludes race and social class from the discourse and development (Gorski and Goodman, 2014; Morgan, 2021; Mullan, 2023). Due to this specific cultural base, there are limitations with therapy for all situations and people in a multicultural/racial society (Lago, 2006). Subsequently there are calls for action to decolonise therapy in order to challenge the dominant ideas, models, and practices of care, healing, change, and growth in recognition of the various ways people live, heal, and belong with the human and other-than-human-world (Mullan, 2023). This action-oriented process involves recognising and expanding the range of therapeutic practices that enables a more equitable and just world, supporting dismantling of existing power arrangements, and reducing exclusion, facilitating individual differentiation and community belonging (Gorski and Goodman, 2014; Morgan, 2021). As I have recognised, nature-based interventions provide accepting, diverse, and empathic therapeutic spaces for people to engage in their own ways and

move towards their unique selves. However, to understand if nature-based interventions can co-create self-empowering encounters for all requires understanding firstly, the intersections of the above demographic variables on participation and participants' wellbeing, and secondly, the world views which guide practice, participation, and personal development. This would also support interrogating the concept of therapeutic within therapeutic landscapes and understanding the therapeutic variation in the wide range of people-place health enabling encounters.

In summary, through attending to the relational dynamics at nature-based interventions I have highlighted the potential for participation to be transformational for participants' sense of self, wellbeing practices, and sense of belonging. I have also drawn attention to the significance of the personal qualities of facilitators and the capacity of participants to actualise and self-heal. This highlights the facilitators' and participants' generative capabilities in fostering affective psychosocial environments that can have a long-term beneficial influence on participants' wellbeing. Finally, through engaging the geographical concept of therapeutic landscapes with person-centred psychotherapy I have enhanced our understanding of the intra- and interpersonal relational processes involved in (facilitated) therapeutic landscape experiences. Overall, these theoretical and empirical developments can support lively and creative research within health and wellbeing geography.

...And for me, where to now? As a researcher, as a therapist, as a person who cares deeply for all interconnected life on Earth, I will follow two threads of hope. In a recent lecture I gave as part of a first-year undergraduate module focused on global environmental challenges, some students responded that nature connectedness offered them some hope amongst the eco-anxiety and the rhetoric of the 'world being on fire'. Alongside nature connectedness I hold deeply to person-centred psychotherapy as a way of being and a political act against divisive politics and social injustices and inequalities. In my thesis I have specifically focused on the intra- and interpersonal relationships involved at nature-based interventions as a significant factor in facilitating deep change for people and co-creating long-term beneficial wellbeing practices that support people's being and belonging. Next, I wish to continue exploring these

relational dynamics in partnership with nature-based interventions to firstly, further develop our understanding of the psychosocial processes and the long-term effects for participants – contributing to the evidence-base to support improved funding. Secondly, to support the development of training for facilitators. Thirdly, to delve further into the role of nature connectedness at nature-based interventions on ecological and participants' long-term wellbeing. A longer-term hope is to apply this understanding regarding nourishing and nurturing interactions, to support moving away from requiring affective sanctuaries (for both people and nature) towards a society that actively supports flourishing as unique interconnected individuals and species. The latter is a grand ambition, but perhaps no grander than applying to, starting, and completing a PhD as a 'plan b' in response to not being able to have children, whilst still in the midst of disenfranchised childless grief. Throughout my PhD I clung, rather tentatively at times, to my belief in my organismic valuing process and trusted that I was moving towards enriching experiences. It has not always been smooth, but I take the learnings, tears, and support with me, folding them into my process of becoming a person. And there is where I go next, as a more or less maladaptive researcher, therapist, and person, towards further enriching experiences. For we have a choice to do nothing or to act...

Appendix A - Interview guides

A.1 Interview guide for facilitators of nature-based interventions

The below themes and questions will provide the basis of my semi-structured interviews. During the interview, the text 'nature-based intervention' will be replaced by the name of the nature-based intervention the facilitator work at.

Interview length: 60-90 minutes.

Introductory Questions

1. What is your role at the nature-based intervention?

Prompts: Background, Team,

2. Why do you do your role?

Prompts: Length of time,

Exploring the nature-based intervention

3. What are the aims of the nature-based intervention?

Prompts: Approach, Ethos, Wellbeing, Nature

4. How are the activities delivered?

Prompts: Organisation, Facilitators, Space, Participants, Social, Nature

5. How do people become involved with the nature-based intervention?

Prompts: Referred, Self-referral, Word of mouth, Links to other organisations, Circumstances of participants, Patterns of attendance, Age range

Exploring the wellbeing benefits and their longevity

6. What would you say are the benefits to participants?

Prompts: Emotional, Physical, Social, Educational, Developmental, Work, Over-time, Vary due to age

7. What would you say are the challenges participants face?

Prompts: Emotional, Physical, Social, Educational, Developmental, Vary due to age

8. Do you have examples of 'success stories' regarding participants?

Prompts: Ages 16-29, Factors involved (Facilitators, Space, Nature, Activities, Participant),

9. Do you have examples of when it doesn't work out for participants?

Prompts: Ages 16-29, Factors involved (Facilitators, Space, Nature, Activities, Participant)

Closing Question

10. Anything else you like to say about nature-based interventions?

Debriefing Questions

11. How did you find the interview?

12. How are you feeling?

A.2 Interview guide for participants of nature-based interventions

The below themes and questions will provide the basis of my semi-structured interviews. During the interview, the text 'nature-based intervention' will be replaced by the name of the nature-based intervention the participant attended.

Interview length: 60-120 minutes.

Introductory Question

1. Can you tell me about your life map?

Prompts: Nature-based intervention, Outdoor experiences, Wellbeing experiences

Exploring participants' experiences of nature-based intervention

2. What are your memories of the nature-based intervention?

Prompts: What stands out, Importance of experience in context of life

3. What was the nature-based intervention about?

Prompts: Activities, Space, Social, Nature, Patterns of attendance, Organisation

4. What factors were important to your experience of the nature-based interventions?

a. How did you find being part of a group?

Prompts: Facilitators, Participants, Relationships

b. What was it like being outdoors?

Prompts: Benefits, Challenges, Space, Activities

c. What activities did you take part in?

Prompts: Nature, Space, Group, Individual, Skills

5. Did you enjoy going to the nature-based intervention?

Prompts: Positive, Negative, Reasons

6. What did you gain/learn from attending the nature-based intervention?

Prompts: Enjoy, Skills, Social Interaction, Understanding, Wellbeing, Over time

7. Where there any challenges you faced when attending the nature-based intervention?

Prompts: Didn't enjoy it, Activities, Outdoor space, Access, Travel, Costs, Discrimination, Outside support

Exploring participant's reason for attending a nature-based intervention

8. What were the circumstances of your attendance of the nature-based intervention?

Prompts: Refer to life map, Reasons, Referred, Self-referred, Volunteering, Supported, Activities, Location, Access, Availability

9. How did the nature-based intervention help with your reason(s) for attending?

Prompts: Facilitators, Participants, Activities, Plan/targets, Difficulties/challenges

10. Did the nature-based intervention impact on other areas of your life at the time?

Prompts: Refer to life map, Other activities, Other support, purpose, wellbeing

Exploring impact of attending a nature-based intervention on participants' wellbeing over time

11. What has been the impact of attending on your life?

Prompts: Refer to life map, Positive, Negative, Improved understanding/awareness of self, Importance of attending on life since, Use of outdoors, Activities, Friendships

12. Has attending a nature-based intervention influenced how you support your wellbeing?

Prompts: Refer to life map, Activities, Practices, Social, Maintenance, Barriers/Difficulties, Over time

13. What has helped you keep positive changes?

Prompts: Access, Availability, Affordability, Support

14. What difficulties has there been in keeping positive changes?

Prompts: Access, Availability, Costs, Discrimination

15. Since attending the nature-based intervention have you:

a. stayed in touch with fellow participants?

Prompts: Refer to life map, Over time, Challenges, Benefits

b. continued to use outdoor space?

Prompts: Refer to life map, Over time, Challenges, Benefits

c. continued any of the activities?

Prompts: Refer to life map, Different organisations, Spaces, Over time, Challenges, Benefits

Closing Question

16. Anything else you like to say about your experience and how it has affected your wellbeing?

17. Ask for any missing demographic information (age, location).

Debriefing Questions

18. How did you find the interview?

19. How are you feeling?

A.3 Interview guide for exploring participants photographs

The below themes and questions will provide the basis of my semi-structured interviews with participants regarding the photographs they took during the photovoice activity. During the interview, the text 'nature-based intervention' will be replaced by the name of the nature-based intervention the participant attended.

Interview length: 60-90 minutes.

Introductory Question

1. How did you find the activity?

Exploring the photographs

2. Please can you tell me about the photo?

Prompts: What is happening, Why did you take the photo, What does this photo say about your life?

Repeat for all the photographs.

3. Is there anything else you like to say regarding the photos?

Prompts: Space, Outdoors, Nature, Activities, Social, Feelings

Exploring any connections to the nature-based intervention and wellbeing practices

4. Did attending the nature-based intervention influence this choice of place and activity?

Prompts: Access, Availability, Affordability, Support, Difficulties

5. Do you engage in other activities for your wellbeing?

Prompts: Other activities, Access, Availability, Connections to the nature-based intervention

6. Do you go to other places for your wellbeing?

Prompts: Other spaces, Outdoors/Indoors, Access, Availability, Connections to the nature-based intervention

Closing Question

7. Is there anything else you like to share regarding the places and activities you engage with for your wellbeing?

Debriefing Questions

8. How did you find the interview?

9. How are you feeling?

Appendix B – Life mapping activity guidance

Why this activity?

I am asking you to take part in this activity before our interview together, as I would like you to reflect on your experience and memories of the outdoor group activity programme you attended during 16-29 years old, and how it relates to other aspects of your life, particularly events related to your other experiences of outdoor blue and green spaces, group social activities, and in relation to your health and wellbeing throughout your life.

Time required

I suggest providing 15-45 minutes to complete the life map in one sitting, however you can take longer, as well as complete it over a period of time if that suits you better.

How to complete the activity

Please use the enclosed paper and pens to draw a map of your life, though you are welcome to use your own materials too. Typically, people start with their birth and go up to the present day. You can include future aspirations as well, if you wish. Often people will start with drawing a line and then mark on the line the events they have experienced in chronological order. However, you can represent your life however you wish. Please note you are in charge of this activity and can choose which experiences you share on the map and with me. If there are experiences you feel are important to you and you wish to represent on the map, but don't wish to say what it is or to talk about it, then please mark these experiences with an **X**. I enclose two examples of life maps, which show two different ways of mapping your life experiences.

Taking care of yourself and support

Before beginning, please ensure you are in a comfortable space and if possible, ensure you won't be disturbed during the activity. After finishing your life map, you may wish to note down any thoughts and feelings and/or sit quietly for a few minutes before returning to your daily life.

I hope that you find this activity interesting and not upsetting, but if you experience distress whilst taking part please take a break, returning when you are ready. I also enclose a list of resources, which you may find of help.

Queries about the activity

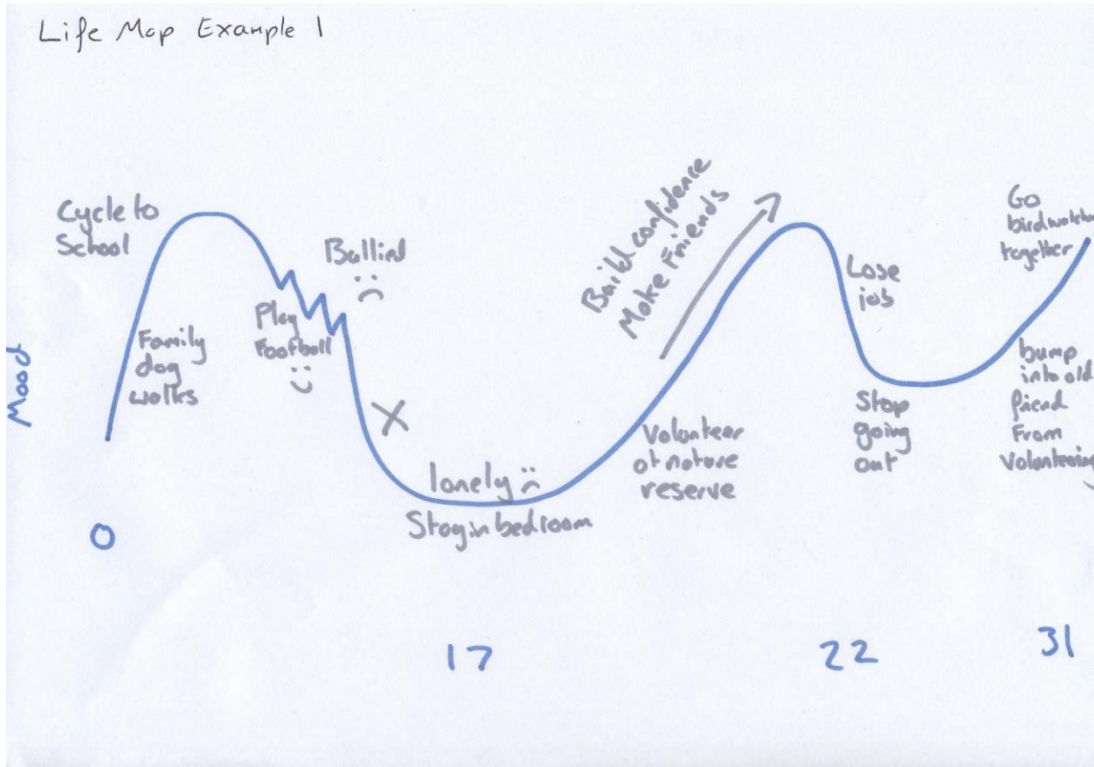
If you have any questions about the activity please contact me by email, a.harrod1@lancaster.ac.uk, or call 01524 594710, please leave a message if I don't answer and I will call you back.

Where to send your life map

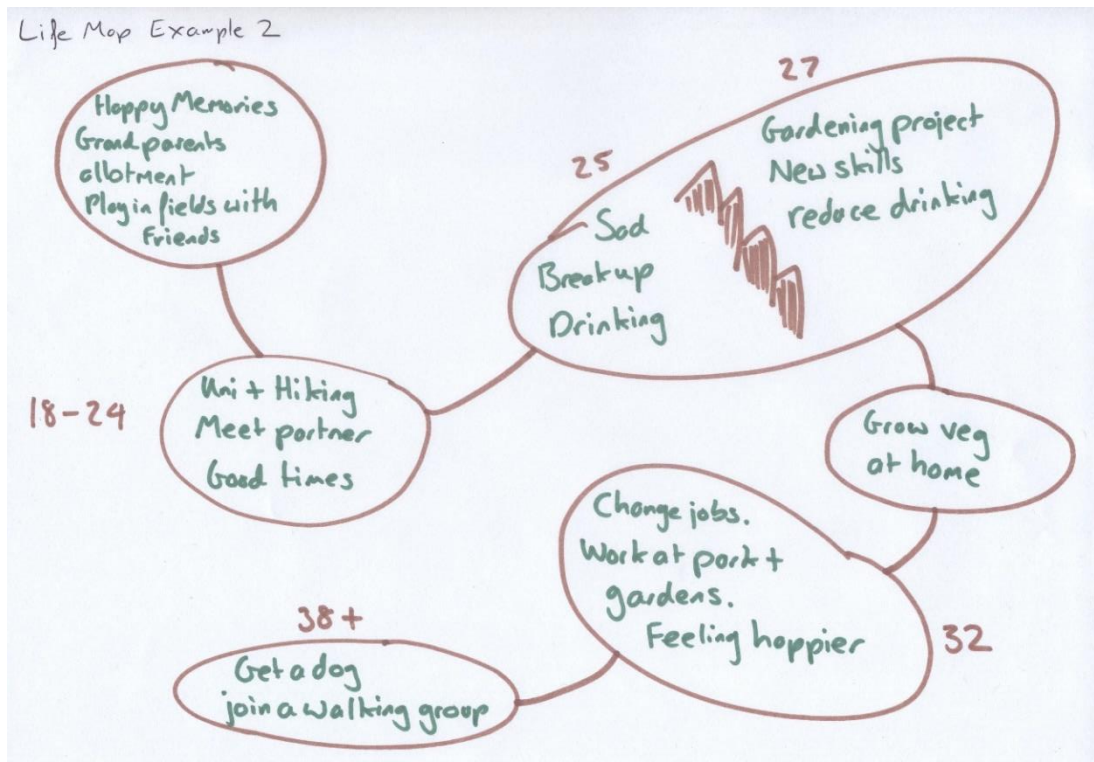
Please send a photo of your life map to me up to a day before our interview together. Please send it to me via our shared folder on OneDrive ((only you and I have access to this group) please read the enclosed OneDrive Guidance on how to do this). Please note whilst I would like to see your life map, it is yours and up to you if you share it

with me. If you choose not to share it with me, please send me an email before our interview letting me know this.

Thank you for taking part.



Life map example 1



Life map example 2

Appendix C - Photo activity guidance

Why this activity?

I am asking you to take part in this activity before our second interview together, as I would like you to reflect on a place that is significant and meaningful to you, where you go for the purpose of your wellbeing.

Time required

I suggest providing 15-45 minutes to complete the activity in one visit, however you can take longer, as well as complete it over a period of time if this suits you better.

How to complete the activity

Please choose a place that is important to you and supports your wellbeing. At this place, please take 5-10 photos of the aspects of the place which are important to you in terms of supporting your wellbeing. These photos may include the activity you complete in that space. Examples of places include parks, gardens, woods, rivers, the coast, nature reserves, community centres, and village halls. Examples of activities include walking, exercise, gardening, bird, or wildlife watching, and crafting.

Taking care of yourself and support

During this activity, please ensure you that do not put yourself or others at harm or take photographs of other people, this is in order to protect their privacy. Please also follow the current government advice in relation to COVID-19 when completing the activity. After taking the photos, you may wish to note down any thoughts and feelings and/or sit quietly for a few minutes before returning to your daily life.

I hope that you find this activity interesting and not upsetting, but if you experience distress whilst taking part please take a break, returning when you are ready. I also enclose a list of resources, which you may find of help.

Queries about the activity

If you have any questions about the activity please contact me by email, a.harrod1@lancaster.ac.uk, or call 01524 594710, please leave a message if I don't answer and I will call you back.

Where to send your photos

Please send 5-10 of your photos to me up to a day before our interview together. Please email them to a.harrod1@lancaster.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking part.

Appendix D - Microsoft Teams interview guidance

As agreed for our interviews we will be using Microsoft Teams, please see the below guidance on using Microsoft Teams.

Accessing your interview

You will be sent an email with a link to your interview. You can join your interview via a mobile, tablet, pc, or a mac.

Mobile or Tablet

There is a free Microsoft Teams app available in the App Store for iPhones and iPads or the Play Store for Android devices. You must use the Teams app to join on a mobile or tablet; you can't join in a web browser on these devices.

1. Before the interview takes place, download the **Microsoft Teams** app from the [Apple App Store](#) or [Google Play Store](#).
2. Do not open the app, create an account or sign in. Just leave the app installed on your device as-is. You do not need to create an account or sign up for anything in Microsoft Teams.
3. At the time of the interview, open the email invite on your device and select **Join Microsoft Teams Meeting**.
4. The Teams app will open automatically. Select **Join as a guest**.
5. Enter your name and continue to join the interview.

PC or Mac

You must be using the latest version of either the Microsoft Edge or Google Chrome web browsers to follow these instructions. You can [download the latest version of Microsoft Edge for free from Microsoft](#) or [download the latest version of Google Chrome for free from Google](#). Both browsers work on PC and Mac.

You won't be able to access the interview space unless you are using the latest version of one of these browsers, so please ensure you are running one before the meeting, webinar or event.

1. At the time of the interview, open the email invite and select Join Microsoft Teams Meeting.
2. Teams will open in a web browser. Select **Join on the web instead**.
3. If you are prompted for permissions to access your webcam and microphone, select Accept.
4. Enter your name.
5. Select Join Now.

Backgrounds

When taking part in a Microsoft Teams interview you may blur your background or set a different background for your camera if you wish.

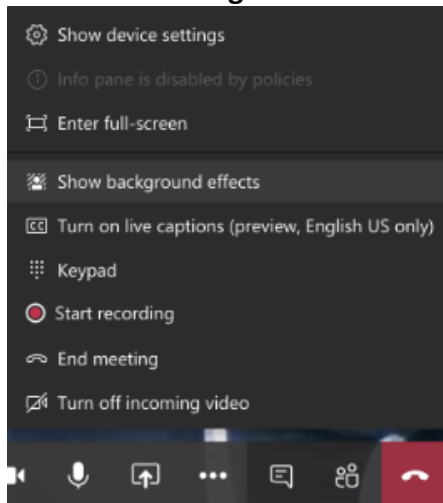
Mobile or Tablet

You can only blur your background in the Microsoft Teams app.

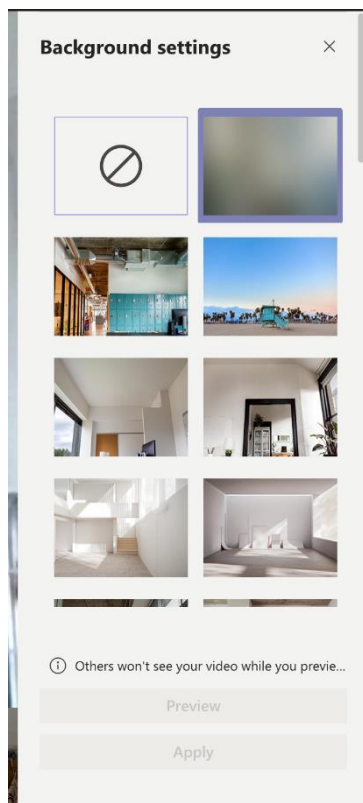
1. When you are in the interview, select the ... **(more actions) button** in the toolbar.
2. Depending on whether your camera is already on there should be a “**blur background**” or “start camera with **blurred background**” option.
3. Click this and your **background** will be **blurred**.

PC or Mac

1. When you are in the interview, select the ... **(more actions) button** in the toolbar.
2. Select **Show background effects**.



3. From the pane that appears on the right-hand side, click the background you would like - you can either blur your background (first option) or select one of the Microsoft default backgrounds.



4. Click **Apply**.

General advice

Location



Try to ensure you are in a quiet location so that your device does not pick up excessive background noise. You may wish to consider using headphones depending on where you are located.

How can I check my microphone, speakers and webcam are working before the interview?

Mobile or Tablet


1. Open the Microsoft Teams Desktop App
2. Click on your **icon/picture** and select **Settings**.
3. Click on **Devices**.
4. Check that your Audio and Camera devices are set up as required. You should see a preview of your camera if connected properly.

When loading the call:

1. Check that **Video** and **Microphone** options are  toggled to on.
2. You can click the  cog icon to open up your audio and camera preferences again.

PC or Mac

In your browser

1. Make sure you **Allow** the browser to use your microphone when the pop-up appears.
2. Click on the  **Devices** cog icon to open up your audio and camera preferences.
3. Check that your Audio and Camera devices are set up as required.

Queries about Microsoft Teams

If you have any questions about using Microsoft Teams please contact me by email, a.harrod1@lancaster.ac.uk, or call 01524 594710, please leave a message if I don't answer and I will call you back.

Appendix E – Ethical approval



Applicant: Andy Harrod
Supervisor: Nadia von Benzon, Amanda Bingley, Mark Limmer
Department: LEC
FSTREC Reference: FST19163

30 September 2020

Re: FST19163
Exploring the role of lived experience of nature-based interventions on participants ongoing wellbeing

Dear Andy,

Thank you for submitting your research ethics application for the above project for review by the **Faculty of Science and Technology Research Ethics Committee (FSTREC)**. The application was recommended for approval by FSTREC, and on behalf of the Chair of the Committee, I can confirm that approval has been granted for this research project.

As principal investigator your responsibilities include:

- ensuring that (where applicable) all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met, and the necessary licenses and approvals have been obtained;
- reporting any ethics-related issues that occur during the course of the research or arising from the research to the Research Ethics Officer at the email address below (e.g. unforeseen ethical issues, complaints about the conduct of the research, adverse reactions such as extreme distress);
- submitting details of proposed substantive amendments to the protocol to the Research Ethics Officer for approval.

Please contact me if you have any queries or require further information.

Email: fst-ethics@lancaster.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "E. Suri-Payer".

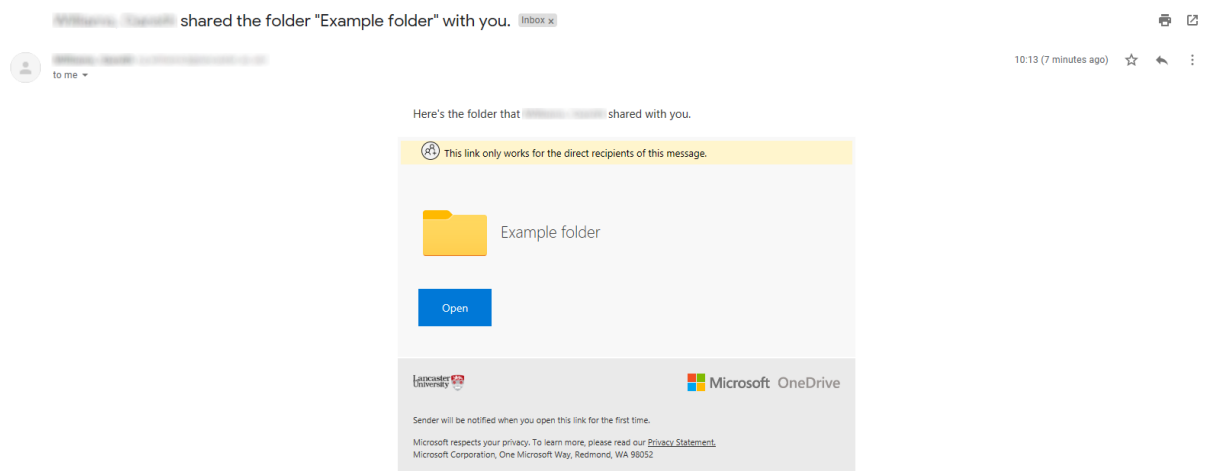
Dr. Elisabeth Suri-Payer,
Interim Research Ethics Officer, Secretary to FSTREC.

Appendix F – OneDrive guidance

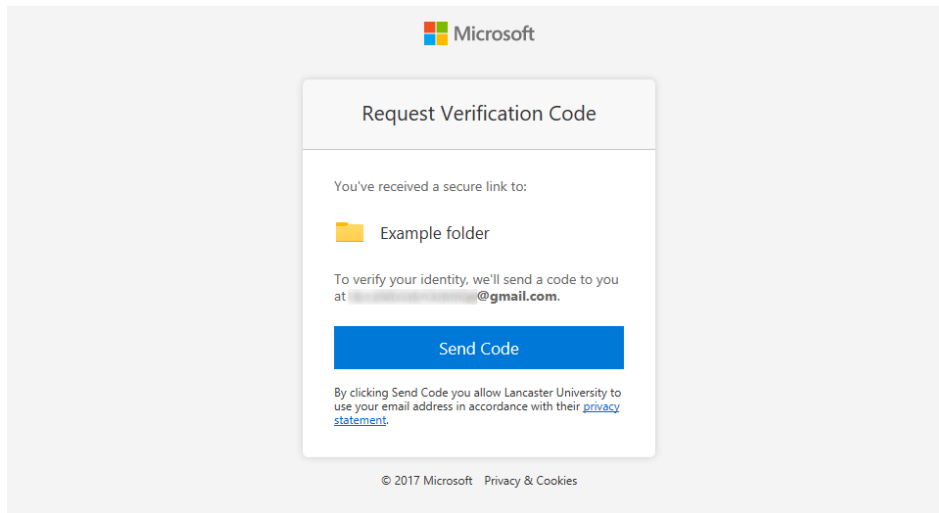
To send me a copy of your life map you will need to share it via the folder I have shared with you. Only you and I have access to this folder. I am using OneDrive as a secure method for you to send your life map as it may contain personal data, and I want to ensure this is kept safe.

Accepting a folder invitation

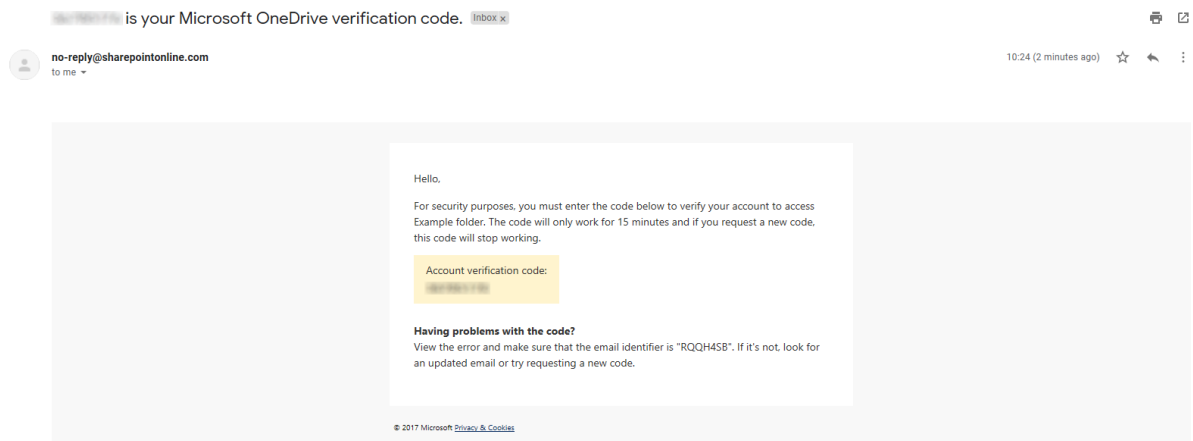
1. You should receive an email from me to your personal email address with the subject **Harrod, Andy (harroda) (Student) shared the folder “GCWB(then a number)” with you.**



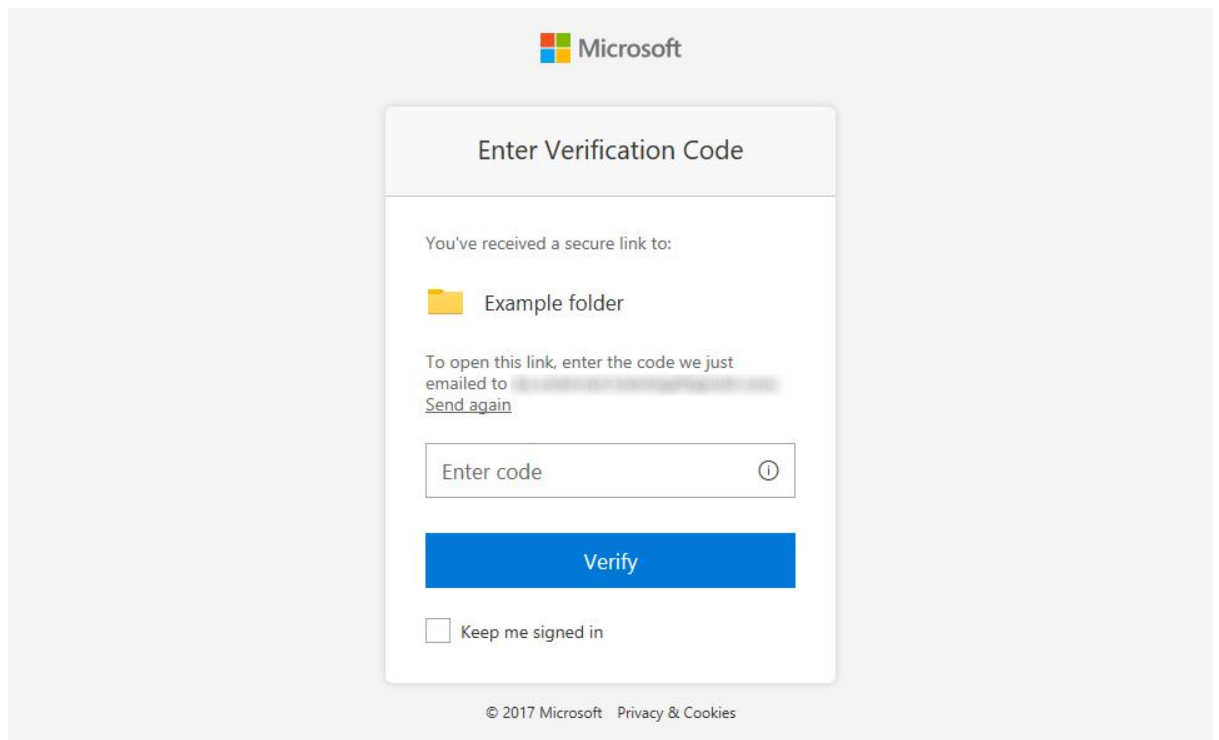
- If you have not received this email, check your spam email folder in case it has been directed there.
 - If you still haven't received it, please contact me to ask me to resend the invite.
2. In the email, click **Open**.
 3. On a **mobile phone**, depending on your email account and settings, you will be either be taken direct to the shared folder in OneDrive or receive the message "This page can't be opened in the OneDrive app. Do you want to open it in your browser?", for this message click **OPEN ITEM** and you will have access to the shared folder. Now go to the Uploading your life map section below.
 4. On a **computer**, depending on your email account and settings, you will either receive a message asking you to access the shared folder via your email account. To do this click **Next**, and you will have access to the shared folder.
 5. Or you will be directed to verify your identity by receiving a code at the email address that you have provided to me. Click **Send Code**.



6. In your email inbox, you should have received an email to your personal email address with the subject **[code] is your Microsoft OneDrive verification code.**

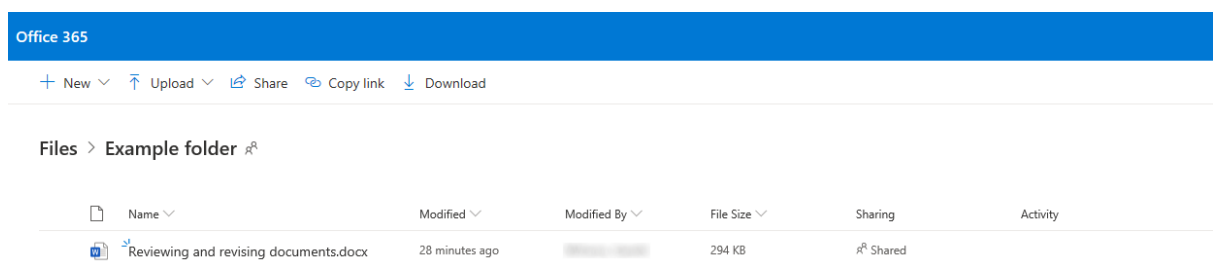


- If you have not received this email, check your spam email folder in case it has been directed there.
 - If you still haven't received it, click **Send again** on the **Enter Verification Code** webpage.
7. On the **Enter Verification Code** screen, enter the code received in the verification code email, then click Verify.



8. You will now be signed into OneDrive into the shared folder.

Uploading your life map



On either a mobile or a computer you will need to click on **upload**, from here select the photo of your life map to upload. Once it has uploaded it will show in the folder.

Accessing the folder again

To access the folder again, you will need to click Open in the email containing the shared folder.

This will reopen OneDrive with a direct link to the folder.

You can alternatively save the link to the page to your Favourites (in Edge) or Bookmarks (in Chrome) for quicker access.

Queries about accessing the shared folder on OneDrive

If you have any questions about using OneDrive and the shared folder please contact me by email, a.harrod1@lancaster.ac.uk, or call 01524 594710, please leave a message if I don't answer and I will call you back.

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