



THE OUTDOOR PARTNERSHIP

EXPERIENCE • ENJOY • ACHIEVE • TOGETHER

Y BARTNERIAETH AWYR AGORED

PROFIAD • MWYNHAU • LLWYDDO • GYDA'N GILYDD

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SPORT
Northern Ireland

FEMALE HILL SKILLS PROJECT

Project Background

THE WOMEN'S HILL SKILLS PROJECT WAS DELIVERED WITHIN BOTH TOP REGIONS, MAINLY WITHIN THE MOURNES AND SPERRINS AONB. THE PROJECT RESPONDED DIRECTLY TO THE UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ONLY HILL WALKING AND MOUNTAINEERING SKILL COURSES, PARTICULARLY TARGETING THOSE FROM RURAL COMMUNITIES ACROSS THESE TWO DESIGNATED AONBS.

FOR DELIVERY, IT WAS KEY TO HAVE FEMALE INSTRUCTORS TO FURTHER STRENGTHEN THE LEGACY IMPACT OF THE PROJECT. OUR INSTRUCTORS FOLLOWED MOUNTAINEERING IRELAND COACH PATHWAY FRAMEWORK WHICH WAS DELIVERED OVER A SERIES OF 15 SEPERATE TRAINING DAYS OF PROGRESSIVE, WOMEN-ONLY HILL SKILLS TRAINING. THIS PROJECT ALSO ACTED AS A FAST TRACK THROUGH HILL SKILL COURSES WHERE PARTICIPANTS WERE ABLE TO TAKE PART IN THEIR MOUNTAIN SKILLS 1 & 2 TRAINING COURSE IN QUICK SUCCESSION.

THE PROGRAMME CULMINATED IN AN INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY EXPEDITION ON 8 MARCH, REINFORCING LEADERSHIP, COLLECTIVE ACHIEVEMENT, AND VISIBILITY FOR WOMEN IN THE OUTDOORS. WE ALSO TIED IN THE USE OF OUR LOCAL OUTDOOR SAUNA PROVIDER WHICH PROVIDED AN ELEMENT OF WELL-BEING, RECOGNITION AND CELEBRATION FOR OUR PARTICIPANTS ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY.

THE PROJECT ALIGNED WITH SPORT NI PRIORITIES BY ADDRESSING HEALTH INEQUALITIES, IMPROVING MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELLBEING, SUPPORTING FEMALE LEADERSHIP, AND CREATING CLEAR PROGRESSION PATHWAYS INTO ACCREDITED MOUNTAIN SKILLS AND HILL & MOORLAND LEADER QUALIFICATIONS.

WE WERE ABLE TO SUPPORT 6 OF OUR PARTICIPANTS WITH BRANDED HIKING KIT. THESE PARTICIPANTS WERE SELECT BASED ON THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE PROJECT IN WHICH THEY UNDERTOOK BOTH MS1 AND MS2 COURSES. WE RECOGNISED THAT THIS PROGRAMME REQUIRED A LOT OF COMMITMENT AND TIME TO DEDICATE OVER 5 DAYS TOWARDS TRAINING. IT WAS NICE TO SUPPORT PARTICIPANTS FURTHER THROUGH THIS KIT AND REDUCE THIS AS A BARRIER FOR PARTICIPATION. THIS KIT WAS VERY WELL RECEIVED AND AGAIN A KEY ELEMENT WITHIN THE PROJECT.

KEY AIMS

- BOOST FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN HILL WALKING AND MOUNTAINEERING IN RURAL AREAS.
- OFFER LOCAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES.
- DECREASE RURAL ISOLATION BY CREATING SUPPORTIVE PEER NETWORKS.
- ENHANCE CONFIDENCE, COMPETENCE, AND SAFETY IN HILL ENVIRONMENTS.
- ESTABLISH CLEAR PROGRESSION INTO MOUNTAIN SKILLS AND FURTHER TRAINING.
- IMPROVE MENTAL WELL-BEING, PHYSICAL HEALTH, AND SELF-ESTEEM OF PARTICIPANTS.
- BUILD LOCAL CAPACITY BY TRAINING WOMEN TO LEAD SAFELY IN UPLAND AREAS.



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RESEARCH

BASELINE AND POST-PROGRAMME EVALUATION DATA WAS COLLECTED THROUGH PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK FORMS. THESE CAPTURED BOTH QUANTITATIVE WELLBEING INDICATORS AND QUALITATIVE REFLECTIONS ON THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE. WE ALSO USED THIS PROJECT TO LAUNCH OUR PARTICIPANT TRACKER PORTAL. GOING FORWARD THIS WILL ALLOW TOP TO HIGHLIGHT PARTICIPANT PATHWAYS OVER THE COURSE OF THEIR PARTICIPATION LIFETIME WITHIN OUR PROJECTS WHICH WILL PROVIDE FURTHER INSIGHTS TO VOLUNTEER AND PARTICIPANT TRENDS.

PARTICIPANTS SELF-ASSESSED CHANGES IN:

MENTAL WELLBEING, PHYSICAL HEALTH, FEELINGS OF ISOLATION CONFIDENCE, SELF-ESTEEM, AND ABILITY TO FACE LIFE CHALLENGES

THE RESEARCH APPROACH FOCUSED ON SOCIAL VALUE OUTCOMES, RECOGNISING THAT FOR MANY WOMEN THE PRIMARY BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT WERE CONFIDENCE, ISOLATION, ACCESS TO LOCAL PROVISION, AND FEAR OF THE HILL ENVIRONMENT.

QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK

QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS WAS OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE, HIGHLIGHTING SEVERAL KEY THEMES:

INCREASED CONFIDENCE AND SAFETY: PARTICIPANTS GAINED CONFIDENCE IN NAVIGATING INDEPENDENTLY AND FOUND NAVIGATION SKILLS TRANSFORMATIVE.

QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION: INSTRUCTORS WERE NOTED FOR THEIR PATIENCE, ENCOURAGEMENT, KNOWLEDGE, AND ABILITY TO CATER TO MIXED ABILITIES. SMALL GROUP SIZES ALLOWED FOR PERSONALIZED SUPPORT.

SOCIAL CONNECTION AND INCLUSION: PARTICIPANTS VALUED THE SUPPORTIVE WOMEN-ONLY ENVIRONMENT AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH LIKE-MINDED INDIVIDUALS.

LOCAL DELIVERY: THE LOCAL DELIVERY WAS APPRECIATED FOR REMOVING TRAVEL BARRIERS AND FOSTERING A DEEPER CONNECTION TO THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE.

PROGRESSION ASPIRATIONS: MANY EXPRESSED INTEREST IN ADVANCING TO ROLES SUCH AS LOWLAND LEADER AND HILL & MOORLAND LEADER, WITH SOME WANTING TO LEAD WALKS TO SUPPORT THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITIES.



PROJECT STATISTICS



14

MOUNTAIN SKILL
CERTIFICATIONS
ACCREDITED

100%

INTEREST IN
FUTURE TRAINING
OPPORTUNITIES



5

COUNCIL AREAS
REPRESENTED



45

FEMALE
PARTICIPANTS
TOOK PART



15

SESSIONS OF
STRUCTURED
TRAINING



MOURNES PARTICIPANT:

"THE ABILITY OF THE INSTRUCTOR TO MEET THE LEARNING NEEDS OF A GROUP WITH VERY MIXED SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE; THE BREADTH AND THE CONTENT LENGTH OF THE SESSION; THE FRIENDLY ENCOURAGING APPROACH OF THE INSTRUCTOR "

SPERRINS PARTICIPANT:

"THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY & LEARNING I RECEIVED FROM MOUNTAIN SKILLS COURSE WHICH I WILL PRACTICE AND PRACTICE AND HOPEFULLY PUT TO GOOD USE. THE FACT IT WAS AIMED AT WOMAN WHO ARE UNDER REPRESENTED ON THE HILLS AND THAT THE COURSE TOOK PLACE IN THE SPERRINS JUST MADE IT THAT MORE SPECIAL AS THE MAJORITY OF COURSES ARE AROUND THE MOURNES WHICH IS A TWO HR JOURNEY."

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KEY FINDINGS

- WOMEN-ONLY HILL SKILLS PROVISION IS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE IN REDUCING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION.
- LOCALLY DELIVERED TRAINING SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVES ACCESSIBILITY FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES.
- SKILLS DEVELOPMENT DIRECTLY CORRELATES WITH IMPROVED WELLBEING, CONFIDENCE, AND LEADERSHIP ASPIRATION.
- THERE IS STRONG DEMAND FOR FOLLOW-ON AND ACCREDITED PROGRESSION OPPORTUNITIES.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- CONTINUE AND EXPAND WOMEN-ONLY HILL SKILLS PROGRAMMES, PARTICULARLY IN RURAL AONBS
- DEVELOP CLEAR FUNDED PROGRESSION ROUTES INTO HILL & MOORLAND LEADER AND MOUNTAIN SKILLS ASSESSMENTS
- INCREASE WEEKDAY DELIVERY OPTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY
- PROVIDE RECOGNITION/CERTIFICATION OF ATTENDANCE FOR CONFIDENCE AND EMPLOYABILITY VALUE (FOR THE ONE DAY SESSIONS)
- EXPAND PROMOTION BEYOND SOCIAL MEDIA TO REACH DIGITALLY EXCLUDED PARTICIPANTS

CONCLUSION

THE WOMEN'S HILL SKILLS PROJECT SUCCESSFULLY DELIVERED MEANINGFUL SOCIAL, HEALTH, AND LEADERSHIP OUTCOMES FOR WOMEN ACROSS NORTHERN IRELAND'S RURAL COMMUNITIES. THE INVESTMENT HAS DEMONSTRABLY REDUCED ISOLATION, IMPROVED WELLBEING, AND CREATED SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS FOR WOMEN TO BECOME CONFIDENT, SKILLED HILL USERS AND FUTURE LEADERS.

PARTICIPANTS REPORTED LIFE-CHANGING INCREASES IN CONFIDENCE AND CAPABILITY, WITH MANY NOW ASPIRING TO LEAD OTHERS AND CONTRIBUTE POSITIVELY TO THEIR LOCAL OUTDOOR COMMUNITIES. THE PROJECT REPRESENTS A STRONG MODEL OF PLACE-BASED, GENDER-RESPONSIVE OUTDOOR PROVISION AND DESERVING OF CONTINUED SUPPORT AND EXPANSION.



PHOTO GALLERY

