



WOLF MEDICINE

EVALUATION OF A SOCIAL RECOVERY PROGRAMME

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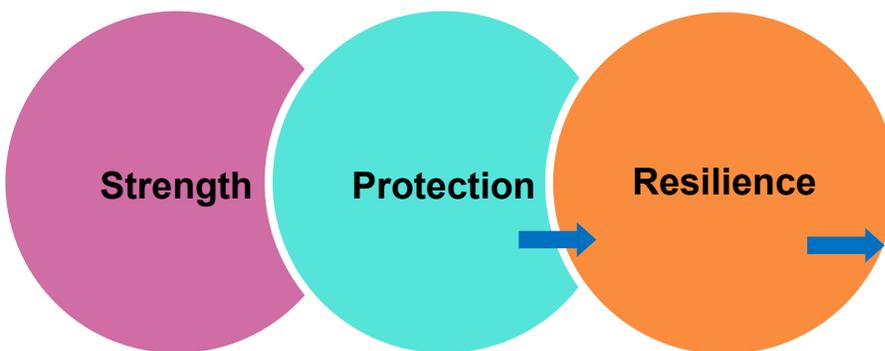
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SUMMARY

NATURE THERAPY CIC

Grateful thanks for supporting the Wolf Medicine programme to:

- Wolf Conservation Trust
- The NHS Substance Misuse Service on the Isle of Wight (IRIS)
 - Members of the 12 Steps programme
 - The Big Lottery
 - Social Care services
 - Mental Health services
 - Nature Therapy CIC volunteers
- All those pioneers who took part in Wolf Medicine



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an evaluation of nine months delivery of the first Wolf Medicine programme in the United Kingdom delivered by Nature Therapy CIC. The project was funded by the Big Lottery as a unique approach involving wolves in social recovery from addiction and mental distress. The programme was co-created by people in recovery.

Wolf Medicine engaged 92 individuals in the first year of operation. This included those with a range of mental illness and addiction diagnosis including dual diagnosis, parents of young children, and ex armed forces personnel. It included those who had been in recovery from two weeks to thirty years.

Participants completed an evaluation format before they took part in Wolf Medicine, immediately after they completed the course, and then again at two months.

The findings demonstrate a **sustained reduction in anxiety levels** from taking part in Wolf Medicine alongside a substantial **increase in social networking and sense of connection**. A review of studies on social recovery highlight that improvements in social relationships lead to better longer term outcomes (Scottish Government 2011).

Feelings of connection and ongoing support from the 'pack' enabled changes such as an **increase in trust and hope for the future**. Significant **improvements in self managing mental health** were also noted.

Parents reported enhancing their **responsibilities and protection towards their children**. They put this down to being able to replicate activities from Wolf Medicine with their children which strengthened bonds, even if their child was in care.

Many participants experienced a paradigm shift towards a **belief they can do recovery**. This belief in recovery grew alongside their **vision for a more positive future**, a new found sense of **inner strength**, and recognition they had found **their own power**. Participants grew towards understanding they are the **experts in their own lives**.

Wolf Medicine provides a **cost effective**, solution focused, approach. It offers an insight orientated modality to social recovery for the individual concerned. One area it was reported as being particularly effective is through nature based activities acting as a catalyst for participants to address the **spiritual dimension of human existence**. They felt the absence of religiosity, yet a focus on the spiritual, was helpful in shifting paradigms and enabling a sense of wider connection that is not available in contemporary mental health service provision.

WHY WOLVES?

*If you want to know the answers to anything then turn to nature
(Albert Einstein)*

Across many parts of the world the wolf has walked alongside humans for at least 20,000 years. In all this time they have been the subject of fables, mysticism and stereotypes which has embedded them deep in our heritage.

A brief look at this history shows a continuing belief in the duality of this powerful and mythical beast. Wolves are feared and revered in equal measures. As much as they are considered protectors, they are also believed to be destroyers. Wolves are social creatures remaining loyal and protective of their packs, yet are often presumed to be guilty of carnage in seeking an existence in line with their nature as a wild animal.

This is the same duality that can be applied to the human psyche. In psychotherapeutic terms, any animal is merely a symbol of what lies within. Many indigenous populations' use/d animals as totems for good reasons, either to help people take on the characteristics of a particular creature to deal with a specific situation, or to explain multi-faceted aspects of our own way of being. We all have the capacity to show different characteristics in any given situation and the wolf is just one manifestation of this ability.

The involvement of wolves in social recovery is particularly valuable for those that have been in the armed forces. In that capacity some had to be highly attuned to their senses to protect their pack, walk alone, and suffer horror and deprivations that only other pack members could understand in order to survive. They have been part of a rigid hierarchy in which they had a clear and specific role. For many members of the Armed Forces, the duality of wolf becomes a metaphor for life.

Wolf symbolism is also applicable to gang work, where the gang is a protective pack within which the individual seeks strength and status. It is especially relevant to those with experience of substance misuse and mental illness because the stigma and misunderstanding that surrounds the wolf can also be found in contemporary society towards those who walk these particular paths.

Wolves have resilience and strength that as humans we admire and at times want to own. They look after weaker members of the pack, especially the cubs. They mate for

life and the female will watch out for the throat of the male by positioning herself under him when there are any threats. This fierce, protective and loyal nature of the wolf is what gives it strength to survive in some of the most inhospitable places on earth and always under threat from human's hunters.

In Wolf Medicine the wolf is a symbolic representation of resilience, an inner strength, as well as protection of self and others. Wolf has the ability to re-connect us with our wild self. This is a self that walks alone, that loves and protects, and not only survives in a wilderness - but thrives. As Rudyard Kipling rightly pointed out, the strength of the pack is the wolf and the wolf is the strength of the pack. So it is with humans.

Many of us walk this world with a disconnection that we cannot place, feeling slightly adrift from others of our kind and perhaps out of step. Holding the wolf as a powerful symbol mindfully can help us find a place to be at peace, where, like a wolf we can wrap our tails around nose to stay warm when life freezes. The wolf symbol can help us develop heightened sensory awareness and to trust our intuition as we learn to associate with those around us, enter the battle, or simply walk away with our nose to the wind.

This is the gift these amazing creatures offer us – to trust and believe in ourselves even when no-one else does.



BACKGROUND

*What a wonderful course! I feel much stronger, much better
equipped to face life. I am so grateful I discovered my inner wolf
as my inner strength*

(Wolf Medicine Alumni)

In the planning stages of designing a programme on social recovery, we undertook substantial research into the possibility of involving wolves. We questioned what function they would serve. This included exploring the meaning given to wolves down through history, as well as contemporary cultural perceptions of an animal long since extinct from our wild nature bank. We looked at research relating to Jungian Psychotherapy, Metaphor Therapy, and Wilderness Theory. We explored use of creative arts, mindfulness and nature to inform the evidence base.

We drew heavily on our own knowledge and 20 years expertise in delivering Equine Assisted Therapy to explore at how the wolf and horse might differ in engaging participants. A key factor in working with those in recovery is offering something that excites and engages as individuals have often been through many forms of treatment in their recovery journey. The horse might engage one client whilst a wolf another, simply because they offer insights into different aspects of our own characteristics, backgrounds and interests.

Outside of the 12 Step approach, it appears there are very few options for long term specialist support, despite ongoing support being a determinant of continued recovery. Cultivating roots and connections is an essential element of ensuring each day in recovery is a successful experience.

Recent increases in drug related deaths, homelessness and suicide is a concern. Substance misuse does not just impact on the individual concerned – it impacts on every layer of their life, as well as their family, friends and the wider community. So, we needed to know the best possible evidence available for designing a specialist support programme.

Alongside this scientific evidence, we required the advice and guidance of Experts by Experience. Without their voices, insights and experiences, Wolf Medicine would not be able to breathe life, success and meaning into the experience of social recovery. The programme was piloted with 23 individuals at various stages of recovery.

We were helped in this by the willingness of the local NHS substance misuse service (IRIS) to ask clients if they wanted to be involved in co-creating a brand new and very unique way of supporting others in recovery. A marked component of many people going through recovery is their willingness to help others and we were grateful for the help and insights they provided.

We were also helped by individuals in recovery from serious mental illness because of concerns on our part about how the metaphor of a wolf would be processed. Four people on the pilot had either a diagnosis of schizophrenia or psychotic episodes so we turned to them for advice. They reported we should not unduly worry about 'over egging the metaphor stuff' as they perfectly understood it was not a real wolf. However, we remained mindful of active psychosis.

The whole concept of not being a 'real' wolf is an interesting one as neuroplasticity is demonstrating that to our physical bodies it does not matter what is real and what is imagined. The physiological responses are the same. Thus, if we imagine we have the strength of a wolf, we are quite likely to experience the psychological impact of that strength. It seems the power of the mind is unlimited and the ancients were wise in this matter when they drew on the strength of the wolf for a hunt.

The ancients used animal symbolism to help them draw on the strengths and skills of a species and for the wolf it has always been about survival. Wolf teaches strength, connection and protection and these are all factors that help individuals build resilience as they try to survive in Recovery World.

The next section of this report provides a brief description of how the Wolf Medicine project was structured.



STRUCTURE OF THE WOLF MEDICINE PROGRAMME

Once the course design was agreed, it was decided a more significant impact was achieved if it was run intensively over a one week period with a maximum of ten people. The resources at our fingertips included a tipi, land, cliffs, beach and a forest to operate from. We wanted this week to be a suspension of usual lifestyle stressors and to facilitate the time needed to immerse oneself in recovery. The majority of the programme took place in the great outdoors so we could draw on the power of nature to engage, connect and provide insights into one's own way of being.

The interactive programme includes horses to help individuals understand how they deal with fear, a Medicine Wheel to encourage deep reflection, a Labyrinth for laying down burdens, Forest Bathing to enhance mindfulness, and Dowsing to provide insights into boundary setting. A toolkit of other hands on experiential ways of developing self-insights was involved. These were creative techniques that could be adapted to meet the needs of different groups. At all times the symbolism of the wolf was invoked as a central metaphor to facilitate strong group/pack bonds.

We ran one group a month and each group formed their own pack for onward peer support. Each pack had a secret face book group through which they communicated and through which further Wolf Medicine support was planned. The concept of the pack was strong, founded on the bonds participants formed during their intensive week together (see section on Secret FB Group).

Contact with real wolves involved a visit to the Wolf Conservation Trust to learn more about wolf behaviour from their experts. It was an opportunity to observe the wolves and to interact with them through howling. From the start this was an essential element of the overall programme. No amount of therapy, research, models or theories can compensate for the experience of interacting with a beautiful wild animal. When a creature such as a wolf or a horse validates you, it is an extremely powerful message that says you are a worthy part of this universe.

Follow on from the intensive week for all Wolf Medicine Alumni involved invitations to take part in follow on Nature Quests throughout the year (see section on Nature Quests).

VOLUNTEERS

The project was initially supported by three trained volunteers who were themselves Experts by Experience in recovery. These volunteers were DBS enhanced checked and had undergone further training in safeguarding.

As the Wolf Medicine work expanded, so more volunteers joined us. At the time of this report Nature Therapy CIC has fourteen skilled volunteers with either professional or personal experience of addiction and mental health recovery. These volunteers include a Registered Social Worker, two ex-army war veterans, a bush craft expert, a retired charity CEO, two qualified ex-youth workers, a Mindfulness trainer, a secondary school teacher, an Art Therapist, a Registered Nurse, a Family Therapist and a long standing volunteer for Nature Therapy CIC who is an inspirational guide in recovery. Together this team of volunteers makes an eclectic and powerful force due to their range of expert experience, knowledge and skills. All took part in Wolf Medicine before volunteering on the programme.

The volunteers receive skilled supervision and ongoing guidance to enable them to undertake this role. In the summer of 2016 we added a level three nationally accredited course in Nature Therapy and Applied Therapeutic Skills for volunteers to take part in. Two volunteers completed the course this year, whilst a further three volunteers completed our nationally accredited Expedition Leaders award. This course is focused on risk management in an outdoor environment. Nature Therapy CIC has an active policy of recruiting volunteers who are Experts by Experience and have been through our programmes.

The remaining sections of this report explore the methodology and insights gained from an evaluation of the first nine months of Wolf Medicine.



PARTICIPANTS

In the first nine months of delivery, the Wolf Medicine programme worked alongside 72 individuals. A further 20 individuals are booked on the courses due to take place in February and March 2017. We have an additional 36 people on a waiting list should we obtain funding to continue Wolf Medicine past March.

At the end of the setup year, a total of 92 individuals will have completed Wolf Medicine. This total is more than double the number of 40 we intended to work with at the outset.

At the start of the project, participants were recruited via the local NHS substance misuse treatment agency. Once Wolf Medicine became more recognized, then individuals joined us via the 12 Steps. Latterly, the majority of participants joined Wolf Medicine due to word of mouth, mainly because previous participants became Wolf Ambassadors. They promoted the course to their friends, family, work colleagues and peers.

Participants were at various stages of their recovery journey - from two weeks to thirty years. They reported a range of addictions such as alcohol, cocaine, heroin, crack, amphetamines, work, cleaning, smoking, food, steroids and sex.

They also had experience of mental distress including diagnosis such as bi-polar disorder, schizophrenia, schizoid personality disorder, eating disorder, borderline personality disorder, post-traumatic stress syndrome, severe anxiety, depression, psychosis, and aspergers. At times a range of co-occurring mental health labels had been applied to an individual alongside their addiction.

Needless to say individuals had often struggled for some years with a complexity of mental illness and addiction which had at times caused severe distress. This distress extended to their family and loved ones. Two parents accompanied their adult children to the course. One mother, who brought her son to the course, stated 'I came with him as I am at my wits end in trying to help him stay safe'. Needless to say these were two of the three adults that did not complete. One further participant did not complete as he was hospitalized part way through the course. He intends to return and complete when better. We are looking at the potential to offer a Wolf Medicine course for family members later in 2017.

FACE TO FACE SUPPORT

Participants could, and were, referred to the project by the Substance Misuse service, 12 Step Programme, Mental Health Services and Social Services but we asked each person to apply independently and to book using Eventbrite. This helped cut down on administration costs whilst ensuring we could easily reach each group member with pre course information and encouragement. It also ensured that ownership for recovery was taken from the outset.

We then arranged to meet with each person before the course where possible. The biggest reason for drop out in any group is that certain individuals can become overwhelmed at the thought of attending a group, in a strange place, with new people. Despite a desire to come along, these feelings can be enough to curtail attendance.

We sought to mitigate this through meeting with individuals to assess if Wolf Medicine was appropriate for their expectations and needs and to encourage them into a group situation. In this way they could at least identify with one person. We also involved the nature therapy dog, Mogs, who is a non-allergic gentle dog who would interact with individuals at the face to face meetings and would then provide an enthusiastic welcome on the first day.

The research evidence shows that involving a dog in a group setting can help break down boundaries and enhance engagement. It gives an individual and the group a focus.

As mentioned, only three people dropped out of the programme. One individual believed the whole course was direct physical contact with wolves. He was terribly disappointed when this didn't happen on the first day. This particular case highlighted a requirement to check and re check with a potential participant their understanding of the course at the initial meeting. It was evident that some felt the course was clinical therapy. Whilst Wolf Medicine could be considered a therapeutic *approach*, we were careful to ensure participants understood it as social recovery.

Another focus for the one to one meetings was to establish if there was any additional need we should cater for. Wolf Medicine takes place in an outdoor environment where the activity each group takes part in is dictated in part by the members. Thus, if a participant is unable to manage steep steps to the beach we will change the venue to suit. However, some participants with mobility challenges expressed anxiety they were 'holding the group back'. Eventually the decision was made to deliver a separate group specifically for those with limited mobility.

FACEBOOK SECRET GROUP

The secret FB group was a way for members to stay connected with their pack. Each Wolf Medicine group had their own secret FB group. It was set up as a way of sharing information not intended for the public domain, for asking for help, and for feeding back how they were managing to move forward with their wolf by their side. It was intended for them to feel their pack close – even if it was virtually.

They could post any time of the day or night and often received an immediate response from another pack member – even if it was two am. Although each pack formed their own unique identity and way of working alongside each other, ultimately it was a resource that became highly valued by the majority of the participants. Some packs used it for support more than others.

A member of the Wolf Medicine team moderated each group to ensure there were no safeguarding issues. Members might comment they felt low or were struggling and the pack would respond with words of support and offers of help. No safeguarding concerns have been picked up to date.

Analysis of the content of these FB secret groups showed it has mainly been used as a tool for members to help and encourage others by sharing similar experiences and ways they have dealt with a particular issue. There was evidence of strong bonding between pack members alongside a deep respect for each other and the Wolf Medicine team.

Members reported being ‘held’ by their pack. ‘connected’ and even ‘loved’ long after the course had concluded. Members physically moved away, but continued to receive support and encouragement. Photographs were shared, get together’s arranged, trips planned, and individuals stated they made ‘friendships that will last a lifetime’.

ALUMNI SUPPORT

Outside of the Secret FB Groups, follow on support for all Wolf Medicine Alumni involved a series of Nature Quests. Quests are so called because they are mini expeditions into the wilder parts of the natural environment that are also voyages of self-discovery.

All Wolf Medicine Alumni are invited to attend these Quests. They are generally well attended although we do have to limit numbers on each one because of risk management. To date, six Nature Quests have taken place with three more to take place before the end of March 2017.

Those Nature Quests which resulted in high adrenaline activities were more popular than the sedate Quests. Bad weather did not always deter. On the Cave of Secret Carvings Quest all those booked turned up on the day despite lashing rain and high winds. Sadly a risk assessment involving potential cliff falls compounded by a double tide meant we had to cancel the Quest and retire for coffee and cake instead.

This level of turn out in these circumstances showed commitment to something outside of the ordinary and to their pack members. A need for high adrenaline may be because participants are often functioning under higher than usual levels of cortisol release and so need something that will trump that. High adrenaline activities have been found to attract individuals with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) - especially in ex armed forces personnel. Quite a large proportion of individuals with addiction have been found to have underlying and sometimes complex PTSD.

In September 2016 we received funding to set up adult learning workshops for those with experience of mental distress. Around half of Wolf Medicine Alumni attended at least one of these workshops. The most popular workshops were those related to Highly Sensitive People (HSP) and how to manage acute sensitivity. Around 75% of those participating in Wolf Medicine achieved a high score on Professor Elaine Aron's HSP self-test (<http://hsperson.com/test/>). As this exceeds the 15-20% of the population reputed to have this trait, further research into addiction and HSP is required.

Once participants realised they were in all likelihood HSP they reported 'the light bulb going on' and seeing it 'as a gift' rather than 'a weakness'. They also reported now knowing they were part of a 'larger family' with some common traits. This was more apparent in men where, since childhood, their sensitivity had often been seen to be in direct opposition to their developing manhood.

It may be that social recovery is not only about reclaiming your soul and long lost passions- but reclaiming and owning your unique sensitivity as a way of being.

FINANCE

A total of 92 people will have participated in the Wolf Medicine course over a one year period. Funding of £8,500 was received from the Big Lottery to help with startup costs. A further £850 was received from the local NHS substance misuse service (IRIS) during the course of the year to purchase a shelter from the cold weather.

The total of £9,350 received means a unit cost per person of around £100. However this unit cost is not based on full cost recovery. It does not take into account the many hours freely donated by the volunteers, costs of training volunteers, or a salary plus on costs for

a coordinator and volunteer supervisor. It did not include the costs involved for the horses, or for the land we use as a base. Nor did it include costs involved in governance of the organisation.

Therefore, it is debatable if this unit cost could be replicated in a commercial context. To illustrate this, the most similar social recovery programme we could find, although it did not actually involve wolves or horses, was run as a residential by First People (Native Americans) in Arizona. The cost for attending that programme for a week was \$8,000 without travel costs.



EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

There is no standard definition of recovery so there is no standardised way to measure success other than by sobriety rates which is notoriously a poor indicator

An evaluation format was established at the outset of Wolf Medicine by adapting a validated mental health recovery tool. This was given to all participants to complete before they took part in Wolf Medicine and again immediately after (n=72). A total of 68 returns were received.

A sample group (n=15) then completed the same format again two months after completion of the intensive week. The number of two month completions is limited in this report because we are only looking at nine months of delivery data.

Participants were asked to record the most relevant statement on a six point Likert scale for 11 statements based on the following recovery categories:

1. Managing Mental Health
2. Physical Health and Self Care
3. Living Skills
4. Social Networks
5. Well being
6. Independent Living
7. Community
8. Relationships
9. Addictive Behaviour
10. Responsibilities
11. Trust and Hope

They were then asked to score on a 10 point Likert scale for a further three statements that included mental strength, self-protection, and level of anxiety

12. On a scale of 1 – 10 how mentally strong have you felt in the last week (with 1 being the least strong and 10 the most)?
13. On a scale of 1 – 10 how protected have you felt in the last week (with 1 being the least protected and 10 the most)?
14. On a scale of 1 – 10 how anxious have you felt in the last week (with 1 being the most anxious and 10 the least)?

Each participant was provided with an evaluation booklet in which to record their perceptions on this 14 scale inventory. They were also able to record their comments about Wolf Medicine.

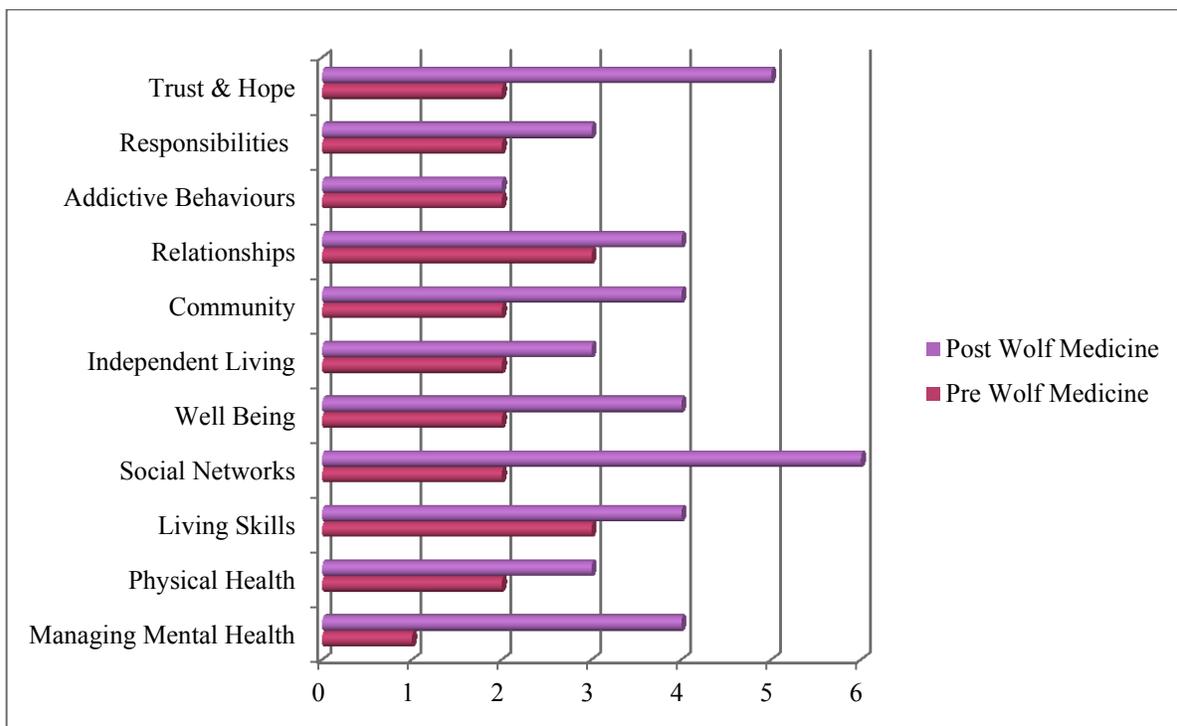


QUANTITATIVE DATA

Data from the 68 completed returns was aggregated into mean scores against the eleven areas of recovery.

The score was rounded to the nearest figure for ease of reporting. The time between pre and post scorings was five days:

Chart 1 – Pre and Post Wolf Medicine Recovery Scores



Aggregated mean scores from the 68 returns shows a major improvement in all but one area of recovery. Interestingly the area where there was no numerical improvement was **Addiction**. The wording of the statement relating to this section was *I do not have a problem with addictive behaviour*.

Further discussion with participants on that point revealed those in recovery are cognizant of the fact they have a problem with addiction that most likely will last a life time. They may be managing their recovery but addiction remains a part of their life that will not simply disappear. This question would have been better scored by asking a scaling question of how much of a problem with addiction they felt they had. Adaptions to the evaluation tool have since been made.

The most significant finding was the increase in scoring for **Social Networks**. The structure of the group meant participants spent quality time with their pack sharing experiences and building bonds. As we have already seen from findings on the Secret Face Book Group, this improvement in social networking is likely to be the most valued part of Wolf Medicine in terms of outcomes.

Each group took on its own identity, so the social networking worked in different ways. However this increased score does suggest a need to look carefully at the makeup of each group from the start. For example, we found putting a group of people together with high levels of anxiety was counterproductive. They were unable to support each through some of the activities. Instead they often opted to all sit it out. Whilst this did not appear to deter from the social bonding that took place between members of that group, the set up did not facilitate movement towards trusting others to the same extent. It was notable that no one person in that particular group took on any part of a group role such as ensuring the firewood was collected, milk made available, fire lit in the morning and the kettle kept filled and boiling to provide enough tea for everyone.

Another significant finding was the increase in **Trust and Hope**. One of the key points at the outset for Wolf Medicine was the number of participants who stated they are more likely to trust a wolf than a human. Thus indicating a destroyed belief in humankind. It seems the concept of the wolf pack is a fundamental component in helping individuals to reconnect with humans and start to learn to trust again. During the course, participants have to rely on others to a certain extent when they share experiences. There is laughter, food and fun, and a central component to that is fire. Everyone gathers round the fire pit as a meeting point and it provides a focus right from the start of the course. Fire pulls people in. With fire, stories are shared, further processing of experiences takes place, and the fire is fed at the same time as the participants. Trusting pack members to provide, food, warmth, security, comfort and access to fluids means survival to the wolf - and so it is with humans.

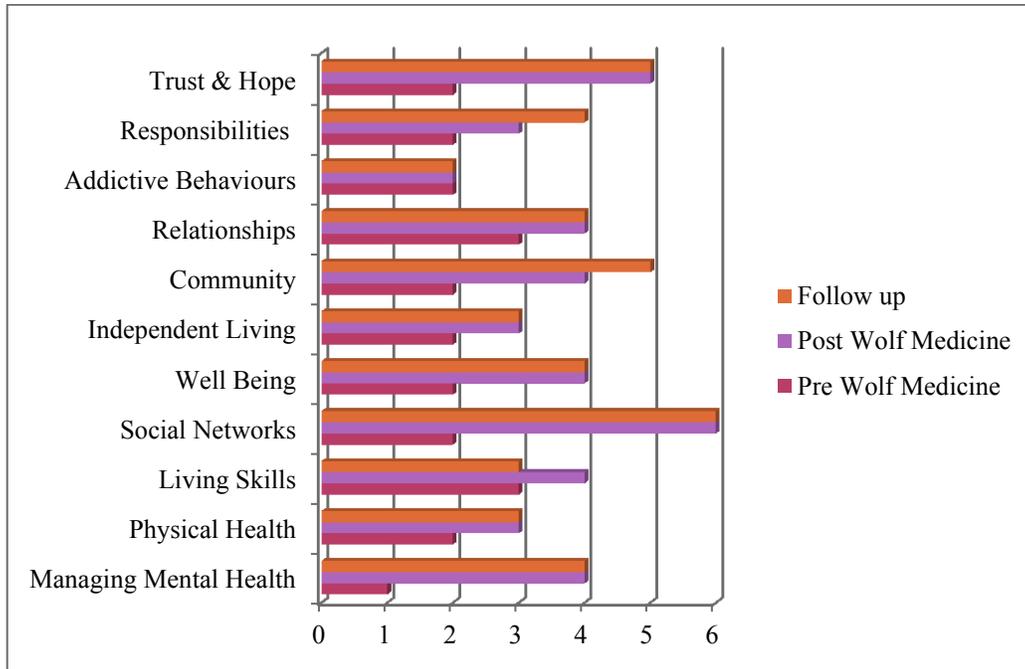
A well bonded group of individuals who have shared similar experiences and spent time together supporting each other through insightful and unusual activities appears to be the start of a process that is rebuilding trust and hope.

Enhancing social networks and building on trust and hope may have had some impact on the improvement of the scores for **Managing Mental Health** we can see in the data. This component of recovery is grounded in the individual knowing that whatever happens to them they are OK. In other words they have a level of mental resilience. Having hope for the future and trusting they will be OK because they have a social network, alongside the improved sense of **Community** we can also see in the data, are all factors to help individuals find their own power.

Chart 1 seems to indicate scores increased in all but the area of Addiction over a five day period, in some areas quite significantly. However, it is questionable if such a level of change could be maintained into the longer term. We questioned if there would be any fall out from being part of such a supportive network and then returning to everyday reality.

Further testing of 15 participants at an interval of two months post Wolf Medicine showed the following findings:

Chart 2 – Follow up scores for Wolf Medicine (2 months)



Taking into account a difference in the number of returns between post Wolf Medicine and follow up (n=68 to n=15), Chart 2 seems to indicate the three key findings of **Social Networks, Trust and Hope and Managing Mental Health** were all maintained over the two month interval, at least in those 15 respondents.

There even appears to be two areas of recovery that further improved - **Community and Responsibilities**. However, Living **Skills** returned to pre Wolf Medicine levels.

Interestingly participants related an initial increase in Living Skills to believing their wild living skills improved on the course. Wild living skills for them equated to survival actions such as collecting wood, cooking on an open fire, and social interactions. However, they felt their living skills in the concrete contained environment they returned to remained constant. One participant mentioned he had not set foot outside his front door for three weeks before he came on Wolf Medicine so he perceived his living skills in that circumstance as inadequate. Whilst on the course he was up early and out enjoying every day on Wolf Medicine and as such believed his living skills improved. Since the course he felt his living skills returned once again to his baseline. Although he did acknowledge ongoing contact with his 'pack'.

Further discussion with the respondents suggests an improvement in **Responsibilities** was a direct result of wanting to enhance, or initiate, contact with their children. Participants had started the process of wanting to take back responsibility during Wolf Medicine triggered by discussions about wolf loyalty and protection of cubs.

Respondents advised that to achieve this, they were using some of the activities learned on Wolf Medicine to get outside with their children. Labyrinths had been built together on the beach, they had gone as a family to do some Forest Bathing, had sat above the cliffs zentangling, and had gone to the stables for contact with horses. They were teaching their children about being Highly Sensitive and how they could best manage this and were having fun dowsing. Mostly they were just getting out in nature which was beneficial for the Wolf Medicine Alumni as well as their children because stronger relationships were being formed.

One individual reported the insights gained on Wolf Medicine helped him start to forge a better bond with his son in intensive foster care. He feared his son was going down the same route in the criminal system he himself had previously taken where he had eventually ended up in prison. He wanted to do everything in his power to prevent that happening to his son and felt Wolf Medicine gave him a structure with which to interact with a resistant teenage boy.

Individuals were cautioned at the end of Wolf Medicine they might feel a bit down the following week as they re-adapted back to ordinary life. They were advised to pull on the strengths and support of their pack using the Secret Face Book group.

Reports of 'missing my pack' were recorded but were followed up with offers to meet for additional support. Only one person requested one to one 'therapy' post course as they had surfaced some insights that wanted to work on. They were pointed in the direction of their pack for social support and their GP for clinical help.

Although no one was under any pressure to disclose, Wolf Medicine did uncover some heart breaking stories that were at times as painful to hear as to tell. This became more apparent as the week progressed and participants started to trust the group.

Delivery of Wolf Medicine requires skill in facilitating and holding a group whilst they process individual and group experiences. Whilst this is not uncommon for most group work, it is even more of a requirement in an outdoor experiential learning environment where there is a need to go with whatever is presented at any given point in time.

Skilled processing/facilitation is vitally important in running Wolf Medicine. It was apparent that volunteers who came with a certain set of skills blossomed in this context as they too grew in confidence and skills in holding a group in such a unique context.

The most significant finding from aggregating the data was that no one individual had a lower score on the recovery evaluation tool after the course than they did before. In other words, some participants maintained a stable scoring on one or two points, but the majority made substantial shifts towards far improved scores on elements of recovery.

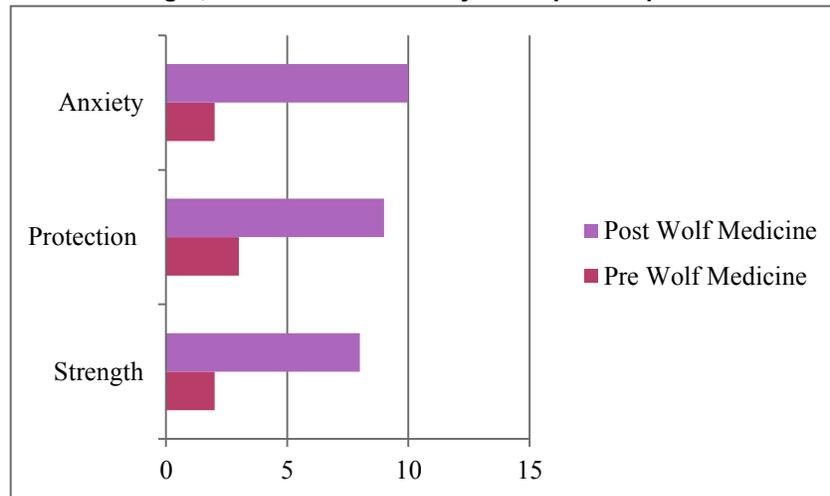
STRENGTH, PROTECTION AND ANXIETY

The next section of the recovery evaluation asked participants to record their perceptions of how mentally strong they had felt in the last week, how protected they had felt in the last week, and how anxious they had felt in the last week. We wanted to obtain a pretest baseline of a normal week and a posttest week after Wolf Medicine (n= 68).

As can be seen from Chart 3 using a mean score there was a significant shift in self-recording in all three areas.

The main finding was the drop in anxiety levels (1 being the most anxious and 10 being the least).

Chart 3 – Strength, Protection and Anxiety levels pre and post Wolf Medicine



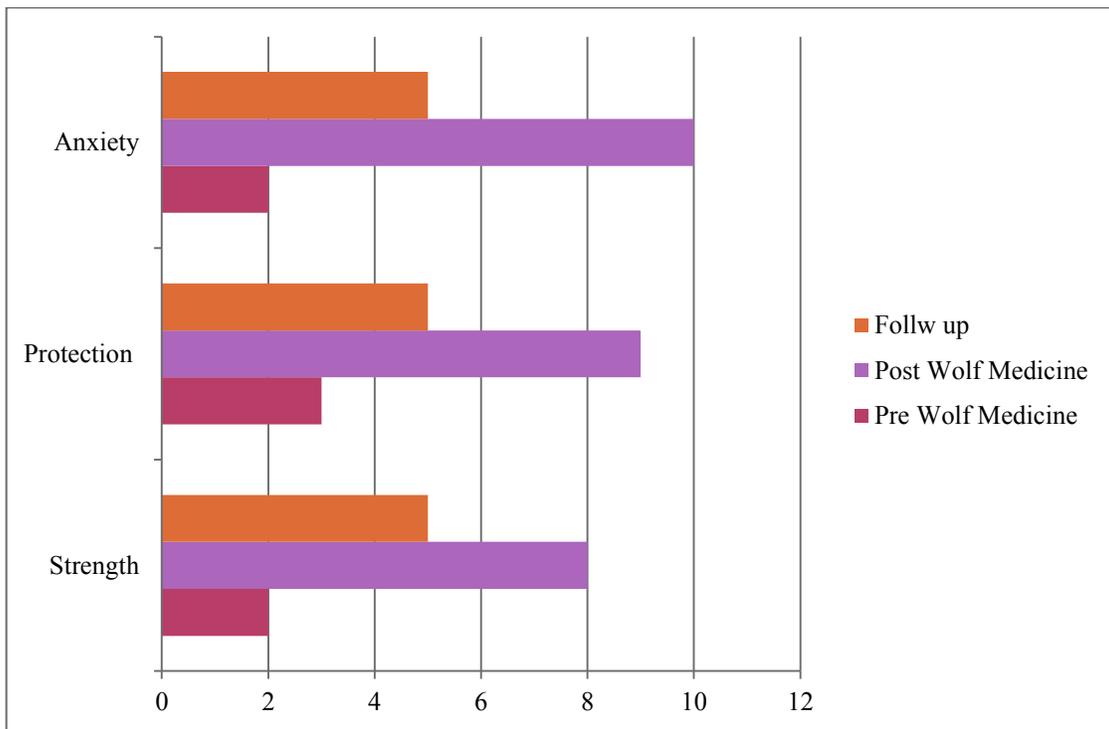
This drop in anxiety levels was a considerable finding. GPs on the Isle of Wight report the main problem they are dealing with in surgeries on a daily basis are requests for help with overwhelming feelings of anxiety.

Wolf Medicine participants reported feeling severely anxious the week before Wolf Medicine yet recorded feeling 'chilled', 'calm', 'relaxed', 'centred', and 'grounded' post Wolf Medicine.

Whilst it might be considered hard to sustain this level of *least anxiety* when going back to everyday circumstances, we can take heart from studies that show that some of the strategies we use in Wolf Medicine such as Mindfulness, Meditation and Forest Bathing have all been found to reduce anxiety levels. Considering the majority of Alumni inform us they continue to use some of these tools and techniques first tried out on Wolf Medicine, the following chart from the two-month follow-up is not so surprising. It shows a promising outcome of a maintained drop in anxiety from pre-Wolf Medicine levels.

Chart 4 shows that whilst the level of anxiety may have risen slightly, it is nowhere near the level of pre-Wolf Medicine. Participants put this down to feeling they now had some practical skills gained from Wolf Medicine to self-manage, and their pack to call on when anxiety levels start to rise.

Chart 4 – Strength, Protection and Anxiety levels follow up at 2 months



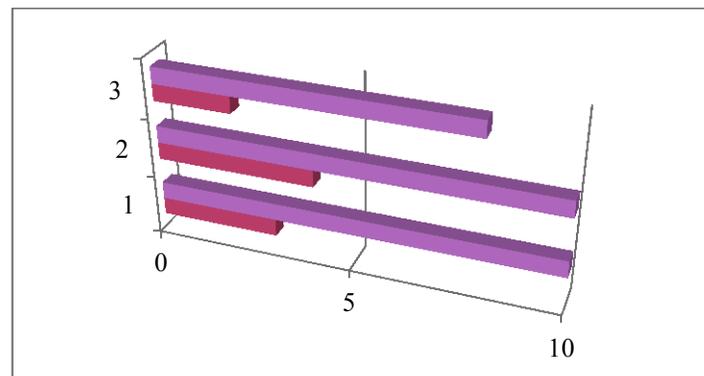
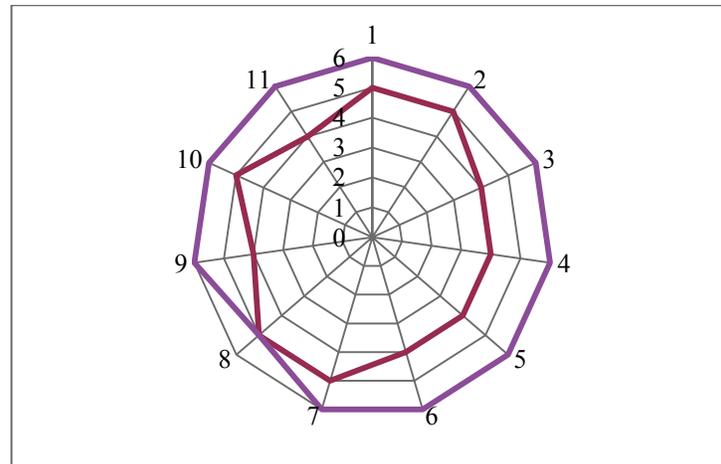
There were also improvements in feelings of strength and protection (1 being the least and 10 being the most). The two month post programme data shows these levels did not drop to, or below, pre Wolf Medicine levels.

We can hypothesize from this data that individuals were possibly drawing on the strength and protection of their inner wolf to sustain them beyond pre Wolf Medicine levels. This will be explored further in the Qualitative Data section of this report.

INDIVIDUAL CHARTS

To illustrate the quantitative data further, we took three random samples of individual participant's charts to look at them in more detail. The intention was to give further voice to the data

Chart 5 – Example 1 of a Participant's Charts



In Chart 5 you can see that there was a significant shift towards improved mental health recovery in all but the statement around personal relationships.

This particular individual was experiencing a distressing breakdown of a long term relationship. Despite this, his self-reported anxiety levels dropped from the level he expressed at the start and he felt mentally stronger.

Chart 6 illustrates the finding previously discussed about the statement on addiction. Despite this, there is a shift in all other areas of recovery:

Chart 6 – Example 2 of a Participant's Charts

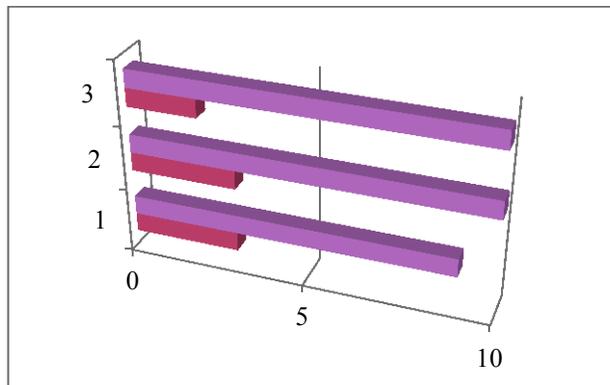
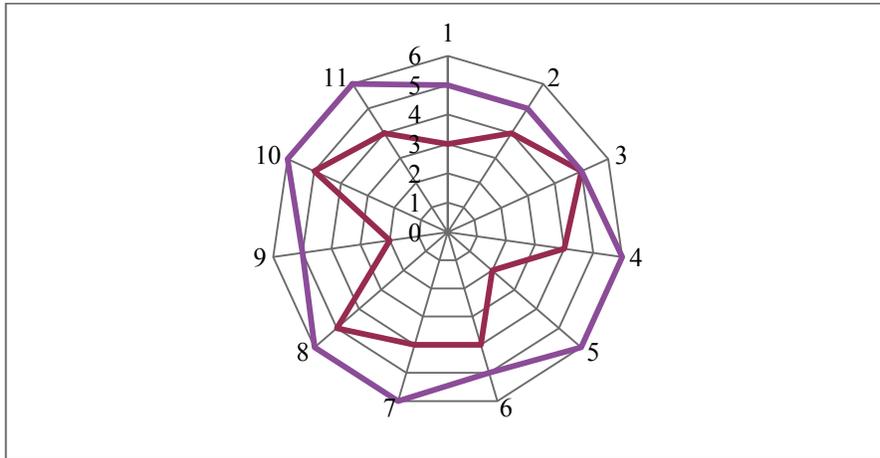
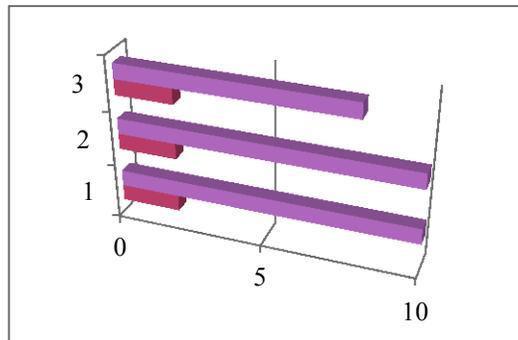
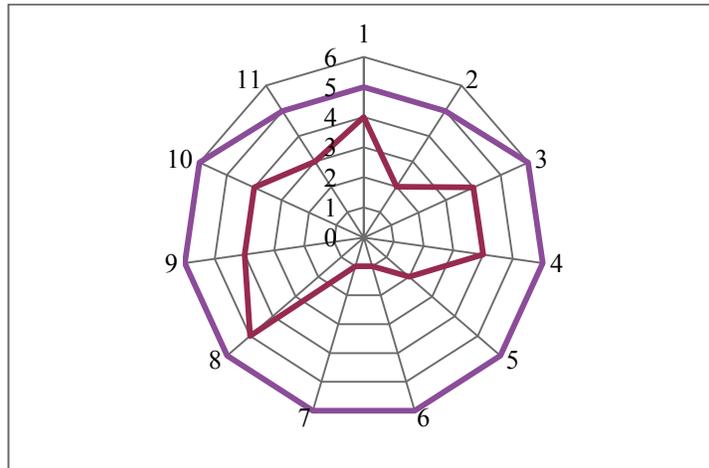


Chart 7 demonstrates significant improvements in all aspects of recovery as well as significant reduction in anxiety levels and an increase in self-belief that the individual is able to find inner strength and self-protection.

Chart 7 – Example 3 of a Participant's Charts



SUMMARY

Whilst this quantitative data collection tool has many faults and leaves more questions than answers, it is a considerable insight into how Wolf Medicine has made a difference for those in recovery to help them to own their own power.

Participants demonstrated a significant reduction in **Anxiety** and a substantial increase in **Social Networking** which is a primary aspect of social recovery leading to the most positive outcomes for participants (Scottish Government 2011). Feelings of having social support from their pack most likely accounts for the promising data changes surfaced post Wolf Medicine on **Trust and Hope** and **Managing Mental Health**.

Beliefs and values about **Community** grew, mainly through taking part in nature based activities on Wolf Medicine designed to protect the environment i.e planting trees. There was also a move towards volunteering, if not with Nature Therapy CIC then with other organisations.

Seeds were sown during the course for enhancing **Responsibilities** in relation to their children. This was highlighted in the two month post course follow up data as participants continued to maintain a sense of personal strength and protection. Most likely achieved through connecting with their inner wolf. We shall explore that hypothesis in the next section of this report.



QUALITATIVE DATA

Recovery is nothing less than making paradigm shifts

(Hazeldene Foundation)

How we interpret the world is shaped by an internal structure of beliefs and concepts. If something is amiss, the paradigm is the place to start. It's the blue print we have of the world – our own unique reality. Paradigm shifts in terms of social recovery means a change in beliefs and values. When someone is faced with enough anomalies against a current paradigm, then change occurs.

We explored the findings in relation to what participants wrote about Wolf Medicine to surface these shifts.

The insights gained from this included:

- how the wolves created a paradigm shift to feelings of strength and protection
- the meaning participants gave to the spiritual component of recovery
- letting go of bereavement and loss
- perception of being connected instead of alone
- a focus on the future
- belief in recovery encouraging a shift towards positivity

The data received indicated the major shift in thinking was to a **belief in recovery**.

I ONLY HAVE TWO WORDS FOR THIS WEEK – LIFE CHANGING. HAS MADE ME THINK IN A DIFFERENT WAY AND A WAY THAT WILL STAY WITH ME AND PROTECT ME.

A key component to this shift is the self-insights that surfaced during the course that helped participants understand the power of recovery lay in their own self-belief:

I FEEL THIS COURSE IS THE FIRST STEP TO THE LIFE I DESERVE. I RECOMMEND IT TO ANYONE. I AM INCREDIBLY GRATEFUL TO ALL INVOLVED AND HOPE EVERYONE ON THIS COURSE TAKES AS MUCH FROM IT AS I HAVE

FANTASTIC COURSE WHICH HAS HELPED ME UNDERSTAND MYSELF FURTHER, PUSHED MY BOUNDARIES, AND SHOWN ME I CAN DO MORE THAN I THOUGHT. THANK YOU X

WOULD JUST LIKE TO SAY THANK YOU AND TO SAY HOW MUCH DOING THE COURSE HAS BENEFITTED ME. I FEEL MY CONFIDENCE HAS GROWN THROUGHOUT THE WEEK

The shift towards self-belief was linked to a new and growing **positivity** about life:

I WENT IN WITH NO EXPECTATIONS AND HAVE FINISHED FEELING VERY POSITIVE.

MY WORK WITH THE GROUP ESPECIALLY (NAME) HAS SHIFTED SOMETHING THAT HAS BEEN HOLDING MY POSITIVITY AND I NOW FEEL MORE ABLE TO LOCK THAT FEELING IN. I HOPE THAT I CAN HOLD IT BECAUSE MY THINKING HAS BEEN VERY CLEAR.

I AM TRULY ENJOYING THE BUSYNESS OF MY DAY AND AM GETTING MASSIVE BOOST.

MET LOVELY PEOPLE AND FEEL I HAVE NEW COPING SKILLS ALSO NEW SKILLS IN GENERAL. THANK YOU TO ALL WHO MADE THIS POSSIBLE.

Interestingly, several participants even stated they had a 'paradigm shift':

I FEEL I HAVE HAD A PARADIGM SHIFT AND I WANT TO TAP INTO NATURE THERAPY ON A REGULAR BASIS. I HAVE MADE FRIENDS AND HAD A BEAUTIFUL TIME.

To facilitate participants finding and holding their own power, a range of tools and techniques were involved during the course of the week. In this way participants could choose what they wanted to take away to use in the future. For example we used several letting go techniques as well as visioning the future.

Responses highlighted that a one size fits all course would not be appropriate and we needed to maintain this **flexible toolkit** so that each individual could adapt it to meet their own needs.

THE OPENING UP AND SHUTTING DOWN PROCESS WAS VERY HELPFUL AS WAS SOUND SCAPING AS ITS THINGS THAT CAN BE DONE EVERY DAY.

I WILL BE USING SOME OF THE THINGS WE HAVE LEARNT TO BETTER MY EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING. I FOUND DOWSING, THE HORSES AND THE MEDICINE WHEEL TO BE THE MOST BENEFICIAL AND I WILL BE USING THESE TECHNIQUES REGULARLY.

LOVED THE FOREST BATHING AND BEING WITH THE HORSES.

IT TOOK A LOT TO OPEN ME BUT IT'S A START TO HELP ME – THE LABYRINTH, THE MEDICINE WHEEL AND ZENTANGLING OPENED MY EYES TO MY INNER EMOTIONS. THANKS YOU FOR THE EXPERIENCE.

I FOUND SERENITY IN THE FOREST AND HAVE LEFT SELF-DOUBT IN THE LABYRINTH.

Participants reported looking forward to continuing to use these tools and techniques:

I CAN'T WAIT TO PUT EVERYTHING I HAVE LEARNED INTO PRACTICE.

It was important these tools and techniques added value to the course by helping participants enjoy the experience whilst learning more about their own way of being.

One of the heartwarming components of the feedback on the course was the extent Wolf Medicine Alumni **recommended the programme to family and friends**. They reported this was because they found it enjoyable as well as beneficial and the Wolf Medicine team was warm and welcoming.

AN ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE WITH A DIVERSE AND WARM GROUP OF PEOPLE.

THIS WEEK IS A TIME I WILL NEVER FORGET.

I LOVED THIS – FEEL SO MUCH BETTER AND DON'T WANT IT TO END.

IT'S BEEN A GREAT COURSE

I HAVE FOUND THIS WEEK MOST HELPFUL.

I WILL BE INFORMING OTHERS I FEEL MAY BENEFIT FROM DOING THE SAME AS I.

WOLF MEDICINE HAS REALLY HELPED ME. IT IS REALLY GENTLE AND GIVES SUCH A WARM FEELING OF BALANCE.EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IT.

I WILL HIGHLY RECOMMEND NATURE THERAPY.

I HAVE HAD A WONDERFUL WEEK.

THANK YOU ALL XXXX

SOME OF MY FRIENDS WOULD SO BENEFIT FOR WOLF MEDICINE.

THANK YOU FOR LETTING ME COME THIS WEEK IT'S AMAZING THE WORK YOU DO. I HAVE SEEN FIRST-HAND THE MANY LIVES YOU HAVE IMPROVED. I AM GOING TO LET OTHERS KNOW

They also reported feeling so inspired by the course they wanted to **volunteer** to deliver Wolf Medicine to others:

I REALLY HOPE I CAN ENROL ON YOUR TEACHING COURSE SO I CAN SPREAD SOME MORE OF THIS MAGIC TO OTHERS AND PAY IT FORWARD.

WELL HELD AND WELL MANAGED. I WOULD LOVE TO COME BACK AS A VOLUNTEER

The paradigm shifts that took place in Wolf Medicine showed a move towards more positivity and a belief in recovery. The value participants placed on the programme was highlighted through wanting to volunteer and train in Wolf Medicine and recommending the programme to friends and family.

Participants were able to leave the programme with a flexible and individualized toolkit of activities that could help sustain them as they moved forward. This next section will explore how the wolf figured in that toolkit.

WOLVES

There was a general consensus at the outset of each group that participants would trust a wolf more than a human. Although this was most likely said in a light hearted way, mistrust of people is a major barrier for recovery.

This mistrust it appears extended to mental health, health, and social care services. Doubts were expressed about confidentiality, beliefs were shared they were not involved in healthcare decisions, and a concern was expressed about the stigma attached to being an addict or mentally ill that led to them being unfairly judged.

Interestingly it was these very beliefs underlying the mistrust of humans that appeared to help participants identify more easily with the wolf. It was the dualistic nature that humans have projected on to the wolf for centuries that those in recovery had often experienced projected on to themselves.

Using a range of techniques, participants are encouraged in Wolf Medicine to identify with their inner wolf. To draw it, name it, feel where it is located and how they can access its strength when required. They are encouraged not to intellectualize their wolf, but to feel it with all their senses – to super sense. Reuniting those who have experienced addiction with their senses is an important element of Wolf Medicine. Sensory experiences are what nourish the human mind and can help build strength and resilience yet it is those very senses that are often dulled by substances and their come down.

Once their wolf became 'real' (think neuroplasticity talked about earlier in this document), s/he was perceived as a **gift**.

THE GIFT OF MY WOLF HAS REALLY STARTED TO TRANSFORM MY ATTITUDE TOWARD LIFE.

MY WOLF HAS BEEN MASSIVELY PRESENT FOR THE WHOLE WEEK. I KNOW IT WILL BE A MASSIVE TOOL FOR ME TO COMBAT ISOLATIVE THOUGHTS.

I HAVE ASKED SOME VERY SPECIFIC QUESTIONS OF MY WOLF AND HAVE GOT VERY CLEAR ANSWERS. I AM REALLY FOCUSED.

IN THE PAST WEEK I HAVE LEARNT DISCOVERED A WAY TO HELP ME LOOK AT ANGER DIFFERENTLY I HAVE FELT THE POWER OF THE LAND HEALING ME AND I HAVE FOUND A NEW TOOL, MY WOLF, I UNDERSTAND THAT THERE ARE THINGS OUT OF MY CONTROL AND THAT IS OK.

The gift of their own unique wolf that was loyal only to them was for some a powerful **source of strength**:

WHAT A WONDERFUL COURSE! I FEEL STRONGER, MUCH BETTER EQUIPPED TO FACE LIFE. I AM SO GRATEFUL I HAVE DISCOVERED MY INNER WOLF AS MY INNER STRENGTH.

FINDING AND CONNECTING WITH MY INNER WOLF (STRENGTH) HAS HELPED ME ADVANCE IN MY RECOVERY FROM ADDICTION (ALCOHOL AND DRUGS).

Despite the understanding that their wolf was just an aspect of themselves they had not previously tapped in to, once identified, their wolf grew in character and became a source of **comfort**. At each visit to the Wolf Centre participants found a wolf that looked just like theirs which helped them further formulate their inner wolf.

For a few, this took longer, especially for those that were not yet back in tune with their senses:

I AM STILL GETTING TO KNOW MY WOLF. HE SHOWS ME GLIMPSES EVERY NOW AND AGAIN, AND OFTEN MANIFESTS AS MY OLD DOG. I FELT MASSIVELY BEHIND THE REST OF THE GROUP AS THEY ALL SEEMED TO BE MUCH QUICKER AT FINDING AND IDENTIFYING THEIR WOLF!

Gaining an understanding of wolf nature and the strategies they use for survival by visiting the Wolf Conservation Centre was important:

THE WOLVES SHOWED ME THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO DEAL WITH SITUATIONS THAT WE ALL HAVE TO FACE IN LIFE 😊

For example a wolf chooses its fights carefully. It cannot risk being injured and unable to fulfil its function or it could put itself and the pack at risk.

One participant talked about feeling cornered by a situation which they knew there was no chance of winning. They were up against a powerful but deeply flawed system. They turned to their inner wolf for help. A wolf has just three strategies - roll over and accept the situation by showing their belly and expose their vulnerable throat for a possible

savaging, show no fear and turn to fight, or simply pass stealthily through the mess with their nose to the wind and an eye on the future.

This participant recognised that by turning to face their perceived enemy and holding their ground they knew they would go down in a blaze. If nothing else they might even exude a hint of madness and savagery that might make others think twice in the future about facing them. Yet by turning to their wolf for help they knew her strategy would be to only turn and fight when the odds were so stacked against her there was no other option. Why waste all that effort and energy fighting a battle they could not possibly win simply to save face. What does a wolf care about face? As much as they wanted to bare their teeth and rip all apart, they chose to pass quietly into the shadows with their wolf by their side. They needed her symbolism to protect them from their own ego.

As participants learn more about wolves and how they walk their own path, so they become inspired to follow in their tracks. The ancients knew only too well that the wolf gives us survival strategies to draw on in a crisis.

Participants saw the wolf not only as a gift but as **a tool to use into the future:**

I FEEL SAFE HERE. I CAN EXPRESS MY FEAR AND VULNERABILITY AND DOUBT AND NOT ONLY GET THE COURAGE TO FACE IT BUT A VALUABLE TOOL, MY WOLF, THAT I CAN CALL ON TO HELP ME WHEN I STRUGGLE IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

It was noted earlier in this report that strength was gained and possibly maintained through the symbolism of the wolf. Whilst further work is needed on this, the last word on wolves in this section goes to a gentleman with experience of severe mental illness who was just a few weeks into his recovery.

This was his report two months after Wolf Medicine:

WHENEVER I CALL MY WOLF I FEEL REAL JOY AND HE COMES IN AN INSTANT. GOTTA TRY NOW TO CALL HIM WHEN MOOD IS LOW BUT SINCE COURSE, MY MOOD HAS BEEN PRETTY STABLE. EVEN UNDER PRESSURE

By connecting with their wolf, participants were connecting with part of themselves they didn't know existed. Often they believed they did not have the inner strength to carry on in recovery, but their wolf was showing them otherwise.

However, it is worth noting that one participant voiced a fear of her wolf because she felt her wolf's wild nature pulled them both to cocaine and alcohol. Once she realised she could chain her wolf and control her rather than her wolf running wild, then the imagery of leashing her wolf but being kind to her, became a powerful tool in her toolbox.

Going from feeling isolated and alien to feeling connected was a major paradigm shift for many.

CONNECTION

The visit to the Wolf Conservation Centre provided the opportunity to directly connect with real wolves through howling with them.

Howling with the wolves seems to speak to us at a primitive level. Participants often experienced it as a call to connect, to feel they were part of the pack. They felt in this connection they were not judged by past behaviours or mistakes. They could just be.

Wolves don't label us with judgmental names constructed by the socially inept to make themselves seem superior. Language such as 'druggie', 'junkie', 'alchy' or 'addict' has no place in Wolf World. Wolves have no such perceptions. If you are part of the pack you are cared for by the others and in turn you care for them. If you can't hunt, food will be bought to you. When you get old or sick you still have a place watching out for the pups. No wolf gets left behind.

It seems participants strongly identified with the wolf. They too can feel ostracized and painted by society in poor light. They too live in a shadowland trying to bury part of their lives. They too have been stereotyped like the big bad wolf in Red Riding Hood with all the ills of our culture being laid at their door.

Even though there was no physical contact with the wolves, many participants felt a connection was made just by being near them, howling with them, and gaining a better understanding of their social and survival dynamics. This connection with the wolves expanded to feeling connected to others on the course and ultimately to nature as a whole:

HERE I FEEL CONNECTED, WHOLE AND VALUED. LOVED IT AND FEEL GOOD.

WHAT A WONDERFUL WEEK WATCHING A LOVELY BUNCH OF PEOPLE GROWING AND FEEL MYSELF GROWING WITH THEM THANK YOU SO MUCH NATURE THERAPY.

FANTASTIC COURSE - REALLY HELPED ME TO FEEL MUCH MORE CENTRED AND CONNECTED WITH MYSELF AND NATURE.

I AM SO GLAD I CAME AS HAVE MADE NEW FRIENDS (MY PACK) AND GOT ME OUT THE HOUSE ALL WEEK WHICH I WOULDN'T NORMALLY DO.

I HAVE HAD A GREAT TIME, MADE NEW FRIENDS THAT I AM SURE WILL LAST.

AN AMAZING COURSE THAT HAS HELPED ME CONNECT WITH NATURE TO SEE THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD.

I HAVE FOUND THIS WEEK MOST HELPFUL. . THE PEOPLE HAVE ALL BEEN GOOD TO BE WITH AND I HAVE ENJOYED THEIR COMPANY. HOPE TO STAY IN CONTACT

I HAVE MET SOME TRULY INSPIRATIONAL PEOPLE. WILL REMAIN FRIENDS FOR A LONG TIME

I WAS IMPRESSED WITH THE STRENGTH OF THE GROUP AND HOW IT GREW IN JUST A WEEK

THE BEST WEEK FOR A VERY LONG TIME EVERYBODY I HAVE MET HAS BEEN AMAZINGLY WARM AND FRIENDLY. I FEEL PART OF IT ALL

These insights into feelings of connection helps support the findings on an increase in Social Networks. Seems building the sense of connection through the wolves and the wolf pack is an essential element of Wolf Medicine.

BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS

A key factor in recovery is managing bereavement, past losses, and mistakes. Being kind to yourself about this ensures paradigms shift in a positive direction. Gaining closure, laying down burdens that have been carried for a long time and facing fears are all part of Wolf Medicine and also the onward Nature Quests.

The question for Wolf Medicine was how could some of the distressing and significant events participants experienced in their lives be processed in such a short space of time on a social programme?

The following comments highlight participant's perceptions of this question:

I HAVE HAD A WONDERFUL WEEK. HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GET SOME CLOSURE ON BEREAVEMENT AND FEEL THAT FACING THIS HAS BEEN A BIG PART OF MY RECOVERY.

I HAVE STRUGGLED MASSIVELY IN THE PAST AT FACING A MEMORY BUT WAS ABLE TO DO IT WITH THE SUPPORT OF MY PACK. IT HAS BEEN EMOTIONAL AND TIRING BUT I HAVE ENJOYED IT DESPITE THE PAINFUL MEMORY.

I GOT A LOT OUT OF THIS COURSE AND IT HAS HELPED ME UNBLOCK SOME THINGS THAT I WAS STRUGGLING WITH.

WAS IN A BAD PLACE BUT THIS HAS HELPED ENORMOUSLY. THANK YOU.

HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GET SOME CLOSURE.

I NOW FEEL BETTER THAN I HAVE FOR A WHILE.

THE COURSE OPENED UP A LOT OF CONTAINED AND CONTROLLED EMOTIONS THAT I HAVE BEEN BURYING. IT TOOK THE WHOLE COURSE TO SHOW ME HOW MUCH I HAD BEEN DOING THIS.

Bereavement and loss was very much linked to the connection and spirituality participants appeared to be seeking. Considering some of the heart rending trauma participants had endured, then the need for some kind of metaphysical framework in which to give meaning to their life and experiences was understandable.

SPIRITUALITY

One of the key factors that surfaced through discussion with participants was that many individuals taking part in Wolf Medicine were seeking a life philosophy. Whereas mental health services focus on the mind, it appears that Wolf Medicine was part of a longer term metaphysical search for understanding what had happened to them in life.

I FIND BEING OUT IN NATURE HELPS ME UNDERSTAND MY PLACE IN THE GREAT BIG WORLD AND THAT EVERYTHING ENDURES IN SOME SHAPE OR FORM DESPITE WHATEVER AWFUL THINGS HAPPEN

Considering participants had experience of childhood abuse, rape, beatings, traumatic death, domestic abuse and sexual exploitation - all leading to feeling they had their power removed, finding their own spirituality could lead to a paradigm shift. Spirituality has been found to be a protective factor in recovery in several studies (Rostasky et al 2007, Walkins et al 2016).

THIS HAS BEEN A TRULY UPLIFTING AND EMPOWERING WEEK. I HAVE LEARNED SOME AMAZING TECHNIQUES TO RECONNECT WITH MY HIGHER SELF

Wolf Medicine does not promote any specific religion or belief, but it was very apparent that spirituality was an element of a *wholistic* approach to recovery. Participants were seeking a spiritual path that spoke to them – and this path appeared to be nature. Discussion revealed a rationale for this based on the long term consistency and predictability of nature that is not a falsehood. It is what it is and does not lie. It can be trusted far more than any human.

IN NATURE I FEEL CONNECTED TO THE WHOLE UNIVERSE BECAUSE ON THE LARGER SCALE OF THINGS IT DOESN'T CARE ABOUT MY PAST

It seems mental distress can make an individual really question the meaning of life and their role on this planet. Feelings of being unworthy and a burden were at times inherent in discussions as were metaphysical debates. This may be worth further exploration in relation to suicide and para suicide.

FUTURE

As noted at the start of this section of the report, a major paradigm shift was towards a belief that recovery was possible. This final section provides a little more insight on how language changed during the course of the week to become more future focused.

I HOPE THIS STAYS SO. I FEEL ENERGISED AND MOTIVATED AND I KNOW I AM HEADING TRULY ON THE PATH TO RECOVERY.

HOPE TO BE BACK HERE AS SOON AS I CAN. IF I AM DOING RECOVERY A DAY AT A TIME THEN I WOULD RATHER BE HERE THAN ANYWHERE.

I HAVE LOTS OF IDEAS FOR FUTURE PROJECTS SUCH AS THE VISION BOARD TO HELP ME FULFIL MY POTENTIAL. THANK YOU XX

THIS WEEK HAS CONFIRMED TO ME HOW I BEST FUNCTION AND FEEL ABLE TO EXPLORE. THIS HAS MADE ME MORE CONFIDENT IN WHAT I NEED TO DO NEXT AND WHAT I NEED TO REMOVE FROM MY LIFE.

I WOULD HIGHLY RECOMMEND IT TO OTHERS AND WOULD LIKE TO TRAIN AND WORK TO HELP OTHERS IN THIS WAY.

THANK YOU. THIS WEEK HAS BEEN INCREDIBLY HELPFUL AND HAS GIVEN ME SOME STRATEGIES TO HELP ME IN THE FUTURE.

ENJOYED THE WEEK KIM, HELPING OTHERS IS HELPING OURSELVES KNOW WHO/WHAT WE ARE. LET ME KNOW IF THERE IS ANYTHING I CAN BE OF HELP WITH XX

I STRONGLY FEEL THAT ALL PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE WOULD BENEFIT FROM THE WOLF MEDICINE COURSE. I WOULD LIKE TO HELP DELIVERIT.

I FEEL MORE AT PEACE WITH WHO AND WHAT I AM AND I LOOK FORWARD TO LIFE AND ITS CHALLENGES.

I HAVE LEARNT SO MUCH ABOUT MYSELF. I FEEL STRONGER AND HAVE A CLEARER PICTURE OF MY LIFE'S PATH WHICH IS POSITIVE.

You can see from the comments that a vision for the future was formulating. Perhaps the last word should go to a participant. This lady was so inspired by the insights she gained on Wolf Medicine that she gave her notice in at a job that was making her desperately unhappy and moved away to follow her passion.

For her the course had unveiled part of her true self. A part she had been hiding because of fear of disapproval from her family. The work with the horses on fear helped build enough anomalies in her thought patterns to shift her paradigm of the world as a fearful place.

PRIOR TO THIS I FELT CONSTANTLY LOST AND ALONE, VERY MUCH AN ALIEN AND MY CONFUSION FROM THIS MAKES ME STRUGGLE IN EVERYDAY LIFE. I FELT LIKE NO ONE UNDERSTOOD ME AND I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THEM. NOW I KNOW I AM IN CHARGE OF MY DESTINY, ONLY I KNOW WHAT IS BEST FOR ME AND I WILL TRUST MYSELF TO FOLLOW MY PATH AND MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES FOR MYSELF. JUST LIKE A WOLF.



Whilst participants were looking to the future, so was Wolf Medicine. The insights gained from evaluating the course have been beneficial in helping us determine the way forward once the Big Lottery funding concludes in March 2017.

Currently we have four options open to us:

1. Make a charge for attending Wolf Medicine however there is a concern that many who would benefit will simply not be able to afford to fund the programme themselves
2. Apply for grants to help sustain the programme for another year whilst continuing to collect data to make a stronger evidence base for effectiveness
3. Develop Wolf Medicine into a social franchise to train others to deliver whilst supporting them and providing quality control
4. Look to Personal Budgets although the take up of personal budgets in mental health is extremely low.

At the time of this report we are looking at a combination of all these four methods of sustainability. This includes a small charge for Wolf Medicine based on a sliding scale of affordability alongside bursaries for those that could not afford to attend. We are starting to apply for grants, and we have also made moves to develop a Wolf Medicine train the trainers programme linked to a Level Three nationally accredited qualification in teaching.

We are carefully monitoring information on Personal Budgets to determine if the situation is likely to change anytime in the near future. The available evidence suggests that Personal Budgets empower individuals in their recovery which is an ethos that fits well with Nature Therapy CIC.

Those on the programme felt strongly about a youth version of Wolf Medicine which after further consultation with Wolf Medicine Alumni parents and their children has resulted in the development of the Wild Wolf Survival course for young people aged 12 – 19 years of age.

Wild Wolf Survival is focused on the symbolism of the wolf as a survival tool. Survival in extreme situations is dependent on the strength of the mind in being determined to survive, so the course is focused on building mental resilience. Young people will receive a Level One qualification in Bush Craft as part of this course.

SUMMARY

A review of 57 studies on social recovery led by Professor Forrester for the Scottish Government (2011) revealed that programmes with a focus on social relationships are linked to better outcomes. These programmes needed to creatively engage individuals, involve skilled communication and provide a 24 hour call service. The findings from Forrester's review go on to state that putting individuals in charge of their own recovery journey, supporting resilience, using empowering processes with flexible responses that value the individual and adopting evidence based practice linking scientific literature with lived experiences will all further positive outcomes.

We feel that Wolf Medicine fits all these requirements. In terms of positive outcomes it is certainly surfacing some important issues about resilience and recovery.

Participants demonstrated a significant reduction in **anxiety** that did not return to their pre Wolf Medicine level. They indicated a substantial increase in **social networking** which is highlighted in Forrester's review as the main indicator of better outcomes.

This increase in social networking was primarily due to the support provided by their wolf pack. Feelings of having social support from their pack most likely accounts for the promising data changes surfaced post Wolf Medicine on **trust and hope** they will be OK. Increased social support helped individuals understand they are the experts in their own recovery and thus own their power to **self-manage their mental health**.

A paradigm shift in beliefs and values about **community** was noted post Wolf Medicine, Participants reported an increase in onward nature based activities to protect the environment as well as volunteering.

The course helped build a structure for **responsibilities** and **protection** towards their children, both of which continued to develop after the course. Many of the activities that took place on Wolf Medicine were replicated with families, thus reportedly building deeper bonds and good memories.

Participants in Wolf Medicine often revealed strength of human spirit that was humbling. It seems they found their power under the symbolism of the Wolf and recognition they are the experts in their own life. Their **belief in recovery** grew alongside their visions for a **positive future** and a sense of **connection** and **spirituality**. All of which was based on a new found confidence, self-belief and an inner **strength** that endured beyond the course.

Nature Therapy CIC is an award winning not for profit voluntary enterprise aimed at improving lives through unique sensory experiences in the natural world.

Immersing yourself in nature is about feeding your senses and it is these sensory experiences that nourish bodies and minds.

Through guided and creative work we enable individuals to find their own power by connecting with their inner self through nature. Personal insights are gained leading to wiser choices being made about the people to be around, how to deal with challenging situations and the best way to move forward into the future

We run programmes for people that perceive the world in an alternative way. Workshops and accredited courses are available for anyone interested in weaving the supportive power of nature into their own lives, or the lives of others.

To find out more visit our website www.naturetherapyCIC.com

Dr Kim Brown is the Founder Director of Nature Therapy CIC and the project coordinator for Wolf Medicine. Kim is a nurse, former midwife and teacher who specialized in working with vulnerable children and adults. She has always been interested in mental health and researching the impact of nature - this led her to spending five years traveling the world for her Doctorate in Health Science and researching the many different ways nature impacts on human wellbeing through the senses. Her passion for many years has been the involvement of horses in improving mental health and well being. She is now keen to add wolves to the growing global evidence base on animal assisted therapy.

Kim is an Expedition Leader Tutor which has helped build a solid and safe foundation to our work in the great outdoors. Kim has also been a Senior Advisor for the Home Office, CEO of a charity, and over the years has developed numerous projects for vulnerable children and adults for which she has won national awards. This includes a national Nurse of the Year award and more recently a national Venus award for Inspirational Professional of the Year.