



The Evaluation of Tortworth Forest Centre Tortworth, Wotton-under-Edge - 2020

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Executive Summary

Tortworth Forest Centre is a community project based in South Gloucestershire which aims to improve lives by reconnecting people with nature, through conservation, wellbeing programmes, outdoor events, courses and volunteering opportunities. With the help of volunteers, they manage 20 acres of land within the wider Tortworth Arboretum, a historically important tree collection in South Gloucestershire. The land is owned and leased to them by woodlands.co.uk. The Centre is managed by a team of dedicated staff and volunteers with Bec Cork as the Director of the Tortworth Forest Community Interest Company (CIC).

This Evaluation has been commissioned by The Tortworth Forest Centre (CIC) in order to satisfy the requirements of their main funders National Lottery Heritage Fund and to measure the outcomes of the project and look at ways to develop it in the future. The Evaluation has been carried out by Amanda Pyne BSc (Hons) an Independent researcher with a background in Occupational Therapy and Social and Therapeutic Horticultural Therapy.

Key Findings:

- All visitors to the Forest Centre open day enjoyed their visit with 22 (71%) selecting the fantastic option and 9 (29%) the ok option. This is further backed up by 27 (100%) of visitors saying they would visit again and the many positive comments written by visitors on the questionnaires and verbally given during the verbal interviews.
- All visitors to the Forest Centre open day enjoyed the activities provided, with 17 (65%) selecting fantastic, 9 (27%) very good and 3 (8%) good. However, a number of visitors made comments for some additions to the open days, for instance improved sign posting and more mini activities for the children. The addition of a natural mini assault course around the Forest Centre has been discussed in the recommendations along with suggestions to improve the sign posting.
- A high majority of visitors 28 (90%) thought the maps and additional handouts/information provided during the open day were helpful. This is further supported by the positive visitor comments given on the questionnaire and during the verbal interviews. However, 1 visitor did request that the maps should be made easier to follow. Therefore, in order to make the maps more inclusive to all I have recommended adding pictures and symbols to the maps.
- A very high percentage of visitors 27 (94%) and a resounding 19 (100%) of volunteers reported their wellbeing improves whilst or after attending/volunteering at the Forest Centre. This is well supported by the fast amount of positive feedback from both visitors and volunteers to the Forest Centre given on the questionnaire and during the verbal interviews.
- A high percentage of visitors 27 (87%) felt that visiting the Forest Centre has helped to improve their knowledge of woodlands and given them a better understanding of our natural world. The volunteers were also asked a similar question during the verbal interviews and reported they too felt their knowledge and understanding had improved.

- On the list of activities for visitors to attend, volunteering was rated low therefore I recommend more input needs to be made by the Forest Centre team to encourage more visitors to volunteer. In the recommendations I have outlined the advantages of making motivational and inspirational posters by using some of the positive volunteers quotes from this Evaluation Report and displaying them around the site during open days.
- Visitors reported during the recorded visitor interviews that they felt that they had learnt interesting new knowledge about woodlands from their visit to the Forest Centre.
- All volunteers rated their experiences of volunteering at the Forest Centre as high and felt the range of tasks and projects suitable and interesting and were happy with the level of instruction and leadership provided. The majority of volunteers also felt they had learnt new skills whilst volunteering at the Forest Centre.
- A small percentage 1 (4%) of visitors and volunteers 1 (7%) who attended the open day/volunteering days are aged 18-24 years. Therefore, In the recommendations I have discussed and given examples regarding advertising on other data bases which are specifically for this age group.
- The data from the Equalities Monitoring form suggests that there is a need for the Forest Centre to continue looking at ways to increase the number of visitors and volunteers from more diverse backgrounds. Recommendations have been made to increase and widen the already strong links with these groups and communities.
- The data from the Equalities Monitoring form also suggests there are a number of visitors and volunteers who have disabilities; however, this number is comparably low compared to visitors/volunteers with no disabilities. The possibility of improved access/exit and the addition of a disabled compost toilet has been discussed in the recommendations to make the Forest Centre more accessible and inclusive to all. The recommendations also include the provision of additional support for disabled volunteers. However, it has been acknowledged that this project may require additional funding to make these improvements.
- The Forest Centre very successfully ran a 4-week volunteering opportunity for a college group of teenage children with learning difficulties. On the feedback form the tutor outlines the positive impact this has had on the children's learning and development and the invaluable part this has paid in broadening the children's outlook and understanding of the role they can take in supporting their local environment and community. Recommendations made include, continuing this arrangement and the possibility of extending it to other similar groups.

Introduction

The Evaluation report is being carried out during the current Global Covid Pandemic and therefore the strict restrictions and guidelines as outlined by the UK Government regarding social distancing and infection control has been followed. This has also meant that the amount of data collected has been restricted due to the Pandemic as a number of the planned events had to be cancelled, due to Government legislation and National lockdowns.

Because of the varied nature of the Forest Centre and the various restrictions imposed by the UK Government a number of different research methods qualitative and quantitative were required in order to carry out this Evaluation and gather the different data for this report in a safe and professional manner. Consent was collected from all participants who participated in the data collection process and details about how their data is stored and will be used, outlined.

The various data collection methods used, included paper questionnaires, online questionnaires, Dictaphone recordings from individual interviewees and also demographic monitoring questionnaires. The questions in this report were developed in joint collaboration with members of the Tortworth Forest Centre management team Bec Cork Director and Amy Stone Community Engagement Officer. There are a number of questions on the questionnaires which have not been included in the Evaluation Report as they were not relevant to the Evaluation and were requested by the management team specifically to be used for feedback on the events held at the Forest Centre. The relevant questions asked on all the above methods were carefully designed to satisfy section 3f of the National Lottery Grants for Heritage, (How will you evaluate your project? Section four: Project outcomes). There are two main distinct groups which use the Forest Centre, visitors and volunteers therefore these are the two groups targeted for feedback and data collection regarding their experiences of attending the Forest Centre.

Visitors were invited to complete a paper questionnaire during an open day event and volunteers during their volunteering sessions, they were invited to complete the questionnaires which included set questions about their experiences and opportunities to write their own comments. Equalities monitoring forms were also available for visitors and volunteers to complete to gather demographic data. Completed questionnaires were handed to a member of the management team and once all the data had been collected, they were sent to myself Amanda Pyne the researcher, where they have been stored securely and included in the findings section of the Evaluation document. A number of visitors preferred to complete electronic questionnaires online after their visits to the open days, these have also been included in the findings section of the Evaluation document.

In addition, a number of recorded interviews were carried out by myself with visitors during an open day event and volunteers during a volunteer session. Each interview was carried out in the open air with infection control and social distance measures adhered to with myself wearing a mask and the participant invited to wear a mask if they preferred and seated 2 metres apart. Each visitor and volunteer were invited to read through the participant information sheet and to read and sign the informed consent form before the interview commenced. The participants were invited to answer 4 set questions in turn which were recorded onto the Dictaphone. After all the recorded interviews were completed, the recordings from the Dictaphone were typed up and have been included in the findings' sections of the Evaluation report.

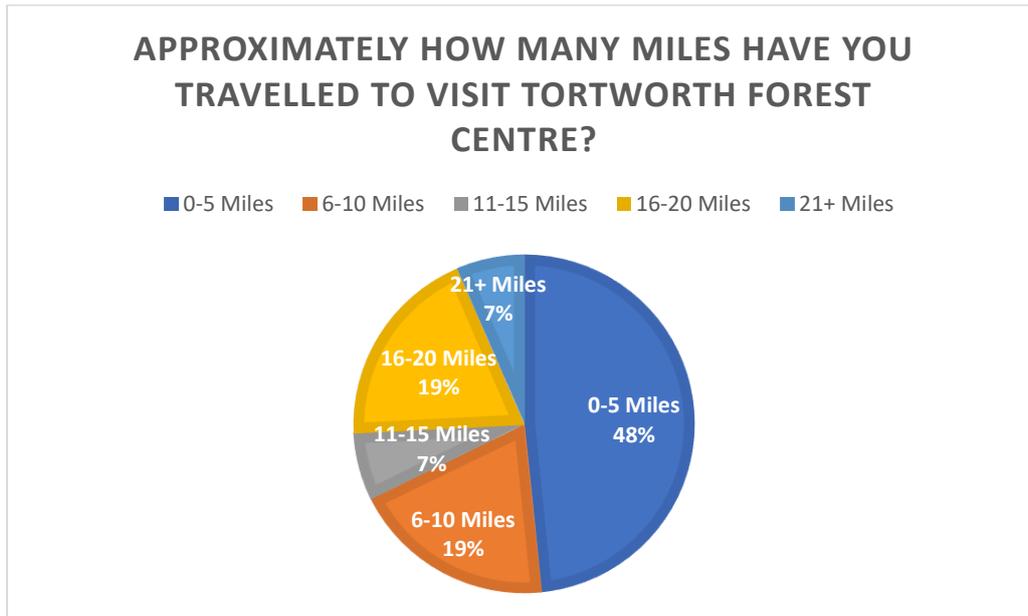
Furthermore, a group of children aged 14 to 16 years with special educational needs from a nearby College, attended the Forest Centre on 4 consecutive Mondays from the hours 9.30am to 2.30pm which included morning and lunch breaks. The type of work they carried out ranged from collecting

pallets and using them to make a platform for goats to climb on, using hammers and nails to reinforce this and using loppers and saws to process rhododendron branches to feeding the goats and giving them water.

Findings

Visitors Findings from Questionnaire from an Open Day Event

Question 1



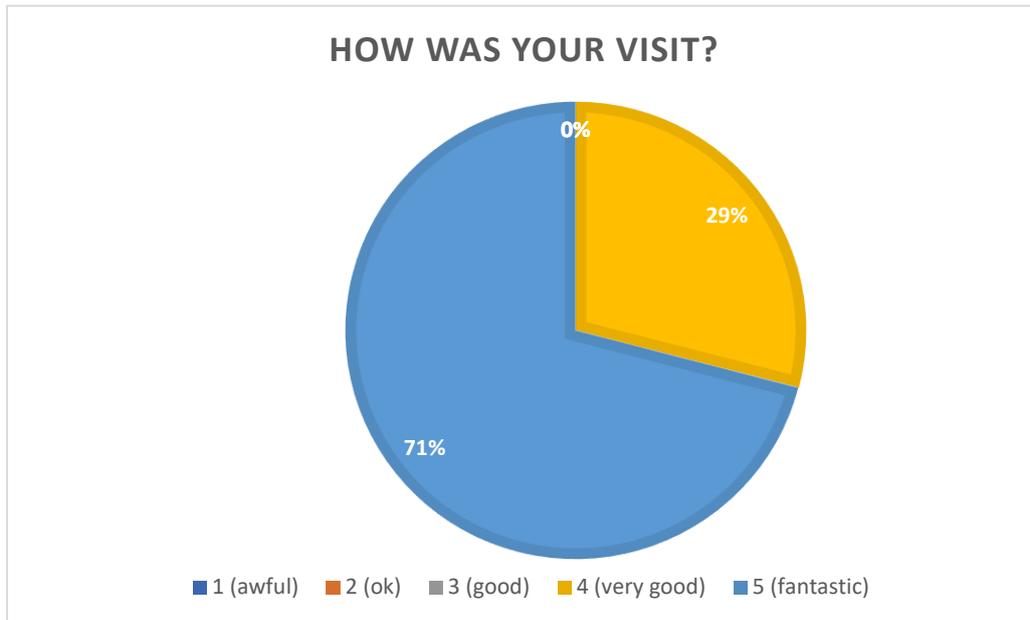
30 responses were received in total for this question with 26 from the visitors' paper questionnaire and 4 from the visitor's online questionnaire. 15 respondents (48%) reported they travelled 0-5 miles to visit the centre, 6 (19%) travelled 6 – 10 miles, 2 (7%) travelled 11-15 miles, 6 (19%) travelled 16-20miles and 2 (7%) of the respondents travelled 21 plus miles to visit the centre.

Question 2



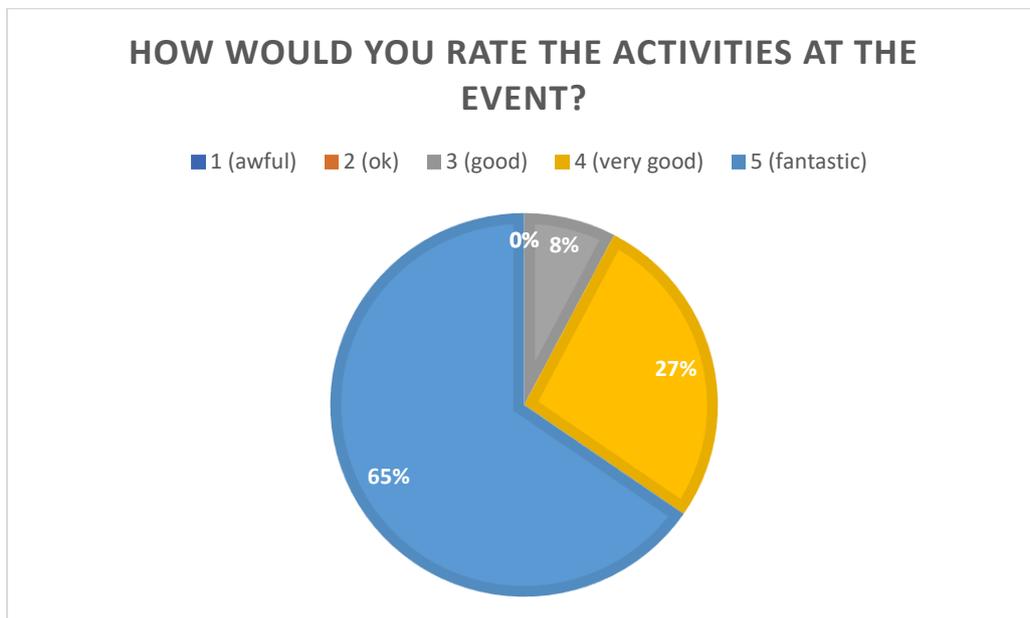
31 responses were received for this question with 27 from the visitors' paper questionnaire and 4 from the visitors' online questionnaire. 11 (36%) of respondents reported that they found out about the forest centre through social media, 9 (29%) word of mouth, 4 (13%) school newsletter, 3 (10%) through other means, 2 (6%) forest centre website, 1 (3%) of respondents reported they found out about the event through a poster and 1 (3%) reported they could not remember. 3 respondents reported they found out about the event through other means with 1 through email and 1 reported they attend the forest Centre and the third respondent through a partner. The question options: local event website, search engines and volunteer did not have any responses.

Question 3



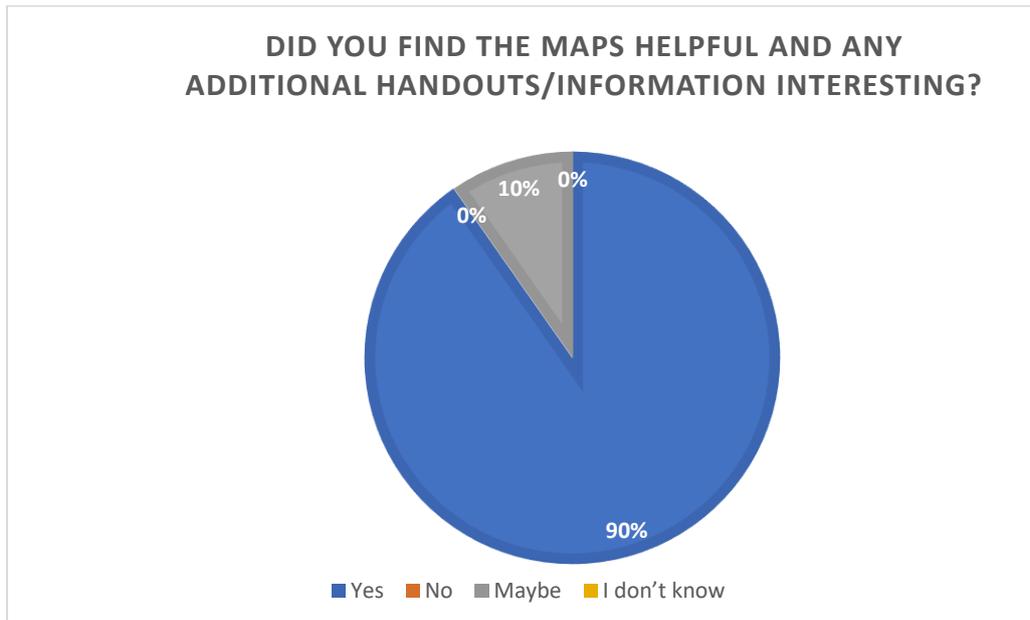
31 responses were received for this question with 27 from the visitors' paper questionnaire and 4 from the visitors' online questionnaire. 22 (71%) respondents reported that their visit was fantastic with 9 (29%) reporting their visit was very good.

Question 4



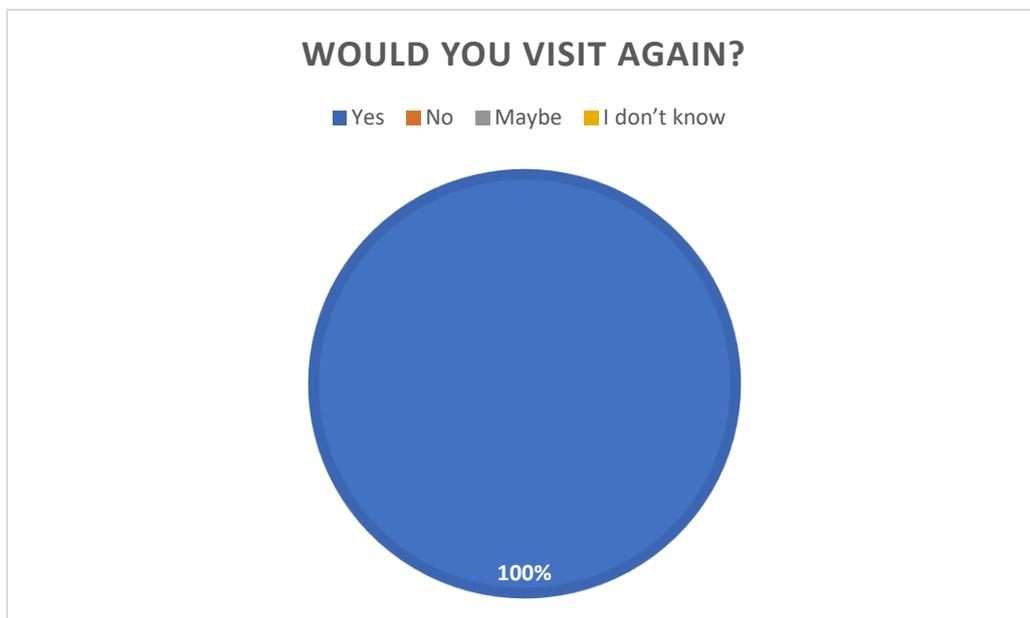
31 responses were received for this question with 27 from the visitors' paper questionnaires and 4 from the online visitors' questionnaire. 17 (65%) respondents reported that they rated the activities at the events to be fantastic, 9 (27%) rated the activities to be very good, 2 (8%) rated the activities to be good. One respondent did not select one of the above categories therefore I have not included them in the above data but have included them in the responses figure as they did respond and wrote on the questionnaire "N/A didn't do any (wasn't booked in)".

Question 5



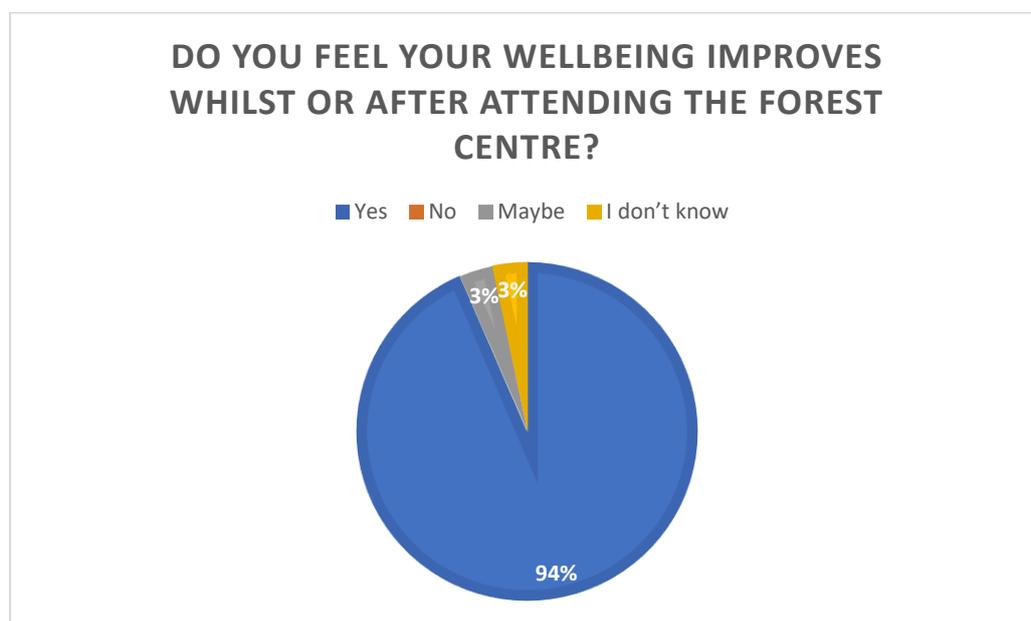
31 responses were received for this question with 27 from the visitors' paper questionnaires and 4 from the online visitors' questionnaire. 28 (90%) of respondents reported that, yes, they found the maps helpful and any additional handouts/information interesting and 3 (10%) reporting maybe. However, 1 respondent who answered yes did write on their questionnaire in the additional information section "make maps easier to follow with more info".

Question 6



31 responses were received for this question with 27 from the visitors' paper questionnaires and 4 from the online visitors' questionnaire. All 31 (100%) of respondents reported that yes, they would visit again.

Question 7



31 responses were received for this question with 27 from the visitors' paper questionnaires and 4 from the online visitors' questionnaire. 29 (94%) of respondents when asked "do you feel your wellbeing improves whilst or after attending the forest centre reported yes, 1 (3%) reported maybe and 1 (3%) reported I don't know.

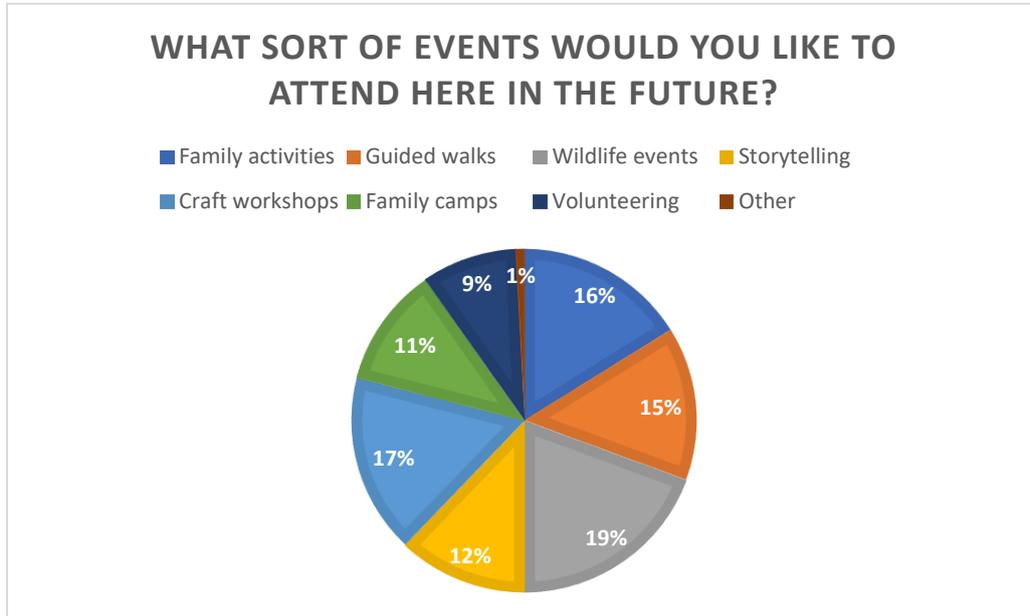
Question 8



31 responses were received for this question with 27 from the visitors' paper questionnaires and 4 from the online visitors' questionnaire. 27 (87%) reported yes, they do feel visiting the forest centre

has helped to improve their knowledge of woodlands and given them a better understanding of our natural world, 2 (7%) reported maybe, 1 (3%) reported no and 1 (3%) I don't know.

Question 9



31 responses were received for this question with 27 from the visitors' paper questionnaires and 4 from the online visitors' questionnaire. However, for this question each participant was invited to select from eight multiple future events, therefore most selected multiple categories. 24 (19%) of participants reported they would like to attend Wildlife events in the future, 21 (17%) Craft workshops, 20 (16%) Family activities, 18 (15%) Guided walks, 15 (12%) Storytelling, 14 (11%) Family camps, 11 (9%) Volunteering and 1 (1%) selected the other category and wrote in the comments "Songs".

Visitor Comments

Comments received in the additional Information section of the paper questionnaire:

- “Really loved the event. The activities were superb – Thanks”
- “Another great event! Good information, especially re the bugs”
- “Beautiful forest, really enjoyed the folk music as well – and the goats!”
- “My two children really enjoyed the open day, unfortunately the booked activities were fully booked, but the hunts were fantastic. Sign posts could be improved, great forest – great day!”
- “Our family had a fantastic day. We loved the community vibes and lovely company”
- “Thank you!”
- “Volunteers are very knowledgeable. We had a lovely time exploring. Thanks!”
- “A really wonderful visit”
- “Stunningly beautiful forests”
- “We had a great time, the children enjoyed following the map and exploring. More mini activities around the site would be great. I.e. – swing was good”
- “Enjoyed our visit, glad we know about this place now!”
- “Thank you!”

Visitors comments in online additional Information section of questionnaire for a bat and moth spotting evening:

“Perhaps the event could be slightly earlier so the likelihood of bats being about would be more in our favour. COVID permitting”

“A great event and even though the weather meant not a huge number of bats or moths, it was wonderful to be out in woodlands and nature at night with such knowledgeable and passionate guides, thank you”

Question 1

Why have you visited the Forest Centre Today?

“Well, I’ve got a 5year old boy who loves the outdoors, yeah, it’s just a great thing to do particularly at the moment, get him involved in the forest school activity you’ve got going on and just walking around an area we haven’t been to before – it’s just great”.

“we live in the city and we actively look for outdoor green experiences to get us out and about, we don’t have a garden so it’s really nice to be able to come to places like this with our daughter and our dog who’s come along too. We heard about the open day and that drew us to this particular event”.

“Well, it was absolutely by accident because we were just coming for a walk around the hotel ground’s we didn’t even know there was an open day and as we were driving up to the carpark, we just saw there was an open day so it was totally by chance”.

“Well, I saw it advertised on Facebook and we only live (local) just down the road and I thought it’s something we can do particularly at the moment when there’s not much we can do. I was interested because I used to bring my son when he was a baby and toddler, he’s 17 now, when he was a baby and toddler we used to come and walk around this arboretum. I don’t know who ran it then but you could just come and walk around but then it was all sort of closed up so you couldn’t do that anymore. So, I was really interested to see what had happened to it and kind of just walk amongst the trees”.

Question 2

How does visiting the Forest Centre make you feel?

“It’s just lovely just something different to do it’s something we try and do at the weekends to be a part of nature and get him away from screens and something we always try and do with our 3 boys and something well continue to do”. I asked how do you feel when you are in this actual forest centre? “it just means You can switch off a bit from a lot of other things to be honest and so particularly for him at his age he’s 5 and he’s just really happy exploring and not having things that restrict him he just enjoys the outdoors really. So, I think for him it’s a massive thing and for me as a parent its really nice to see him exploring and just let his instincts guide him really”.

“I love this one, it’s funny because we do live quite near to Oldbury Court but there’s something about it being proactively used by people and not just ornamentally, so seeing the volunteers, having the fire going and the human alive ness its really warm and welcoming. It’s hard to describe the feeling it’s almost like walking into a village, most woods you go to its like there’s the woods and there’s the people and the people are like extracting an experience from the woods but when you come here you can see the people are in collaboration with the woodland so your’ coming to enter into that and when you come in you also become part of that. So, it’s not like going for a walk in the woods in the normal sense and also being invited to come in and learn about the trees is quite different, like having the map and knowing if we go over here, we can see that particular type of tree. I really love that so you get your curiosity and also we went and touched the red woods I think that felt very interesting as if you pat them there quite hollow sounding the barks like very airy so there’s a feeling of, I don’t know it sounds really hippy of like a communing between you and the trees which we wouldn’t do normally so it’s more tactile”.

“I feel really relaxed and serene, peaceful and just lovely, really lovely”.

“(teenager) Well I think it has made me feel very relaxed it’s definitely like it’s just all so beautiful it just makes you feel so calm and really relaxed. (parent) I was going to say it just makes you feel calm and stop and happy and slow down and It’s nice to listen to the music just then just taking the time to do that and we enjoyed going around and collecting the seeds it made us explore and it was just nice being out in nature”.

Question 3

Have you learnt anything new by visiting the Forest Centre and if so what?

“I wouldn’t say so yet as we’ve only been here an hour or so but for me it’s just about that idea of wild exploration and I think the benefits of it lots of people don’t really get it until you actually come to a place like this and you can just go off and explore and it’s all very safe and secure, I think that can’t be underestimated really”.

“We’ve just never had quite a few of the experiences that we are having like touching these different types of trees, we did some leaf rubbings and picked up some different colour leaves. For me as the adult in our party I learnt that there’s loads more oak tree types than I realised, so we saw some Norwegian ones and another one and the leaves are just much bigger than I’d ever seem – resplendent. So yeah, lots of things that are new, so there’s that type of knowledge oh I didn’t know but there’s also the feeling knowledge of walking around in the woods and seeing how different tree and plants live together so we saw lots of mushrooms on logs in the periphery of other types of plants and they all co habit so not taking them as isolated things as well”.

“Well yeah I knew there was an arboretum here but I didn’t know anything about it. I didn’t know it was like closed all the time or most of the time so I’ve learnt now that you can’t just come and walk around the arboretum you have to wait until there’s a day when its open, I think”. I replied yes, this one is managed by the Tortworth Forest Centre “I didn’t know anything about it”.

(teenager) “Well collecting the seeds of different trees, like I didn’t know the red wood tree what the seed actually looked like and it was really satisfying to almost open the box and see all these seeds of different trees I didn’t really know. (Parent) to be honest I knew the chestnut seed and a pine one but the others we didn’t really know and never really thought about it before so we have now learnt and can identify those trees now which is really good”.

Question 4

Has your attitude towards the natural environment changed because of your visiting this Forest Centre and if so how?

“I’d probably say no but that’s got nothing to do with this centre it’s always been there, I just think that the only thing I would say is how well this is all set up and how well contained it is and you’ve got that lovely mixture between central areas like this and the forest school and the things that are put on but also the opportunity to go and roam but within quite an enclosed area. Yes, it’s a perfect set up I would say”.

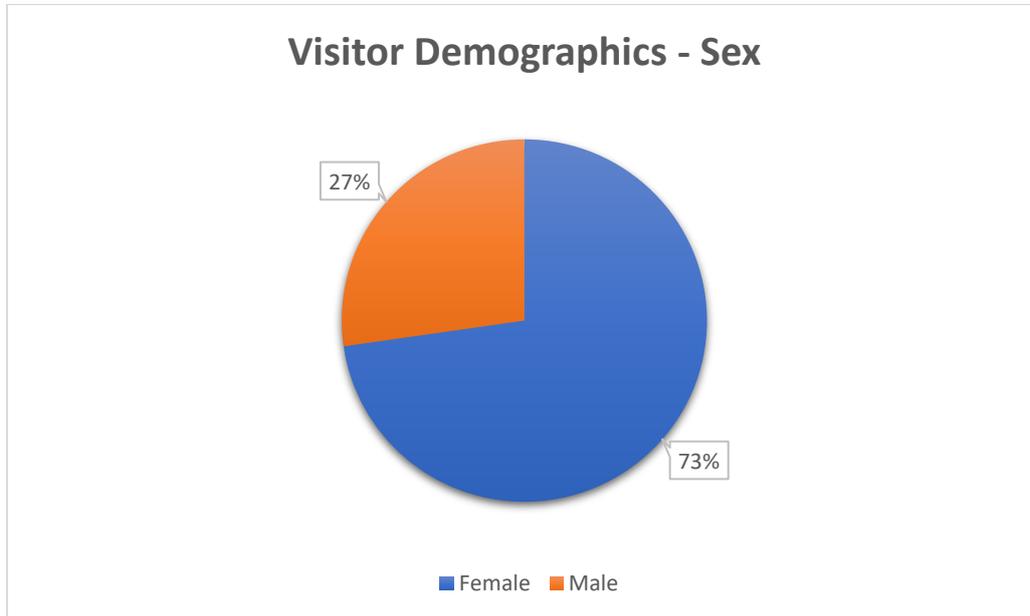
“Yeah I think in parallel to coming here I’ve been thinking a lot more this year with the strange year we’ve been having about getting more involved with the natural world and its sort of reminded me coming here about that I don’t want to look on the world like the climate change and all of that sounds like it’s a disaster and coming here you can realise throughout history people have worked with the plants and alongside the plants and this is a place where humans have taken seeds and saplings and planted them into the ground in order to make a beautiful garden and it’s a lot less disastrous – do you know what I mean – like here is a place where we are not living as if it’s a disaster we can be proactive and put in a new forest together and that seems like a much healthier energy than walking in the world like oh god....that sounds quite meta but there you go that’s what I’m feeling today”. In addition, this interviewee added “Because of the feeling of the place I think we will keep coming back because it has such a nice community feeling to it”.

“I don’t think so because I love the natural environment especially this time of year when all the trees are just letting go and changing colour so I don’t think it’s changed no”.

(Parent) “I think we had quite a good attitude anyway to be honest but I think (teenager) it’s made you aware of how beautiful nature can be if you don’t do all the bad things to it, like chop things down. (Parent)I think it makes us appreciate what’s on the doorstep as well and how nice and beautiful it is and we don’t have to go very far we are really lucky where we live because we have got this access to countryside but this is different because it’s got all the different trees as well and you can walk around, there’s paths (teenager) all the different trees in one place that’s what’s really good about it. (Parent) Whereas, where we normally live, we usually walk across fields and that’s not as interesting as somewhere like this”.

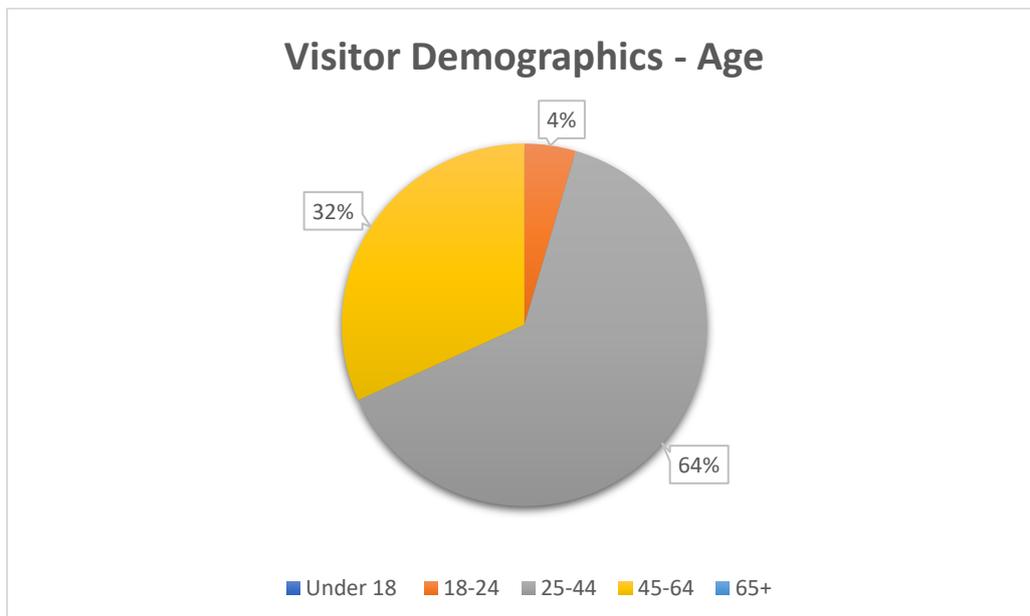
Visitor Demographics Monitoring Questionnaire

Question 1



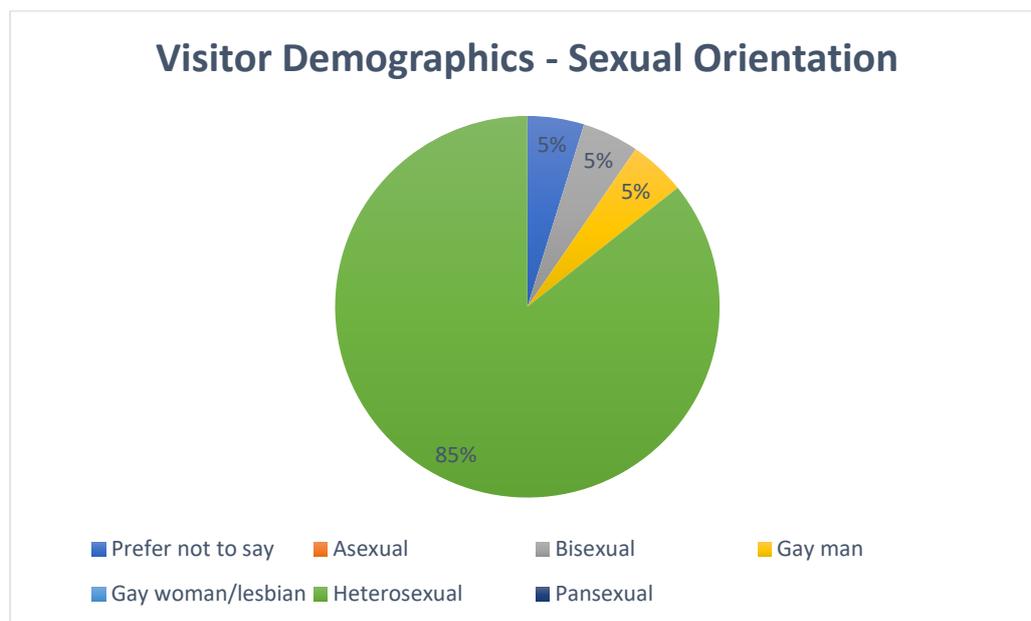
22 Responses were received for this question from paper monitoring questionnaires. 16 (73%) of visitors selected female and 6 (27%), male.

Question 2



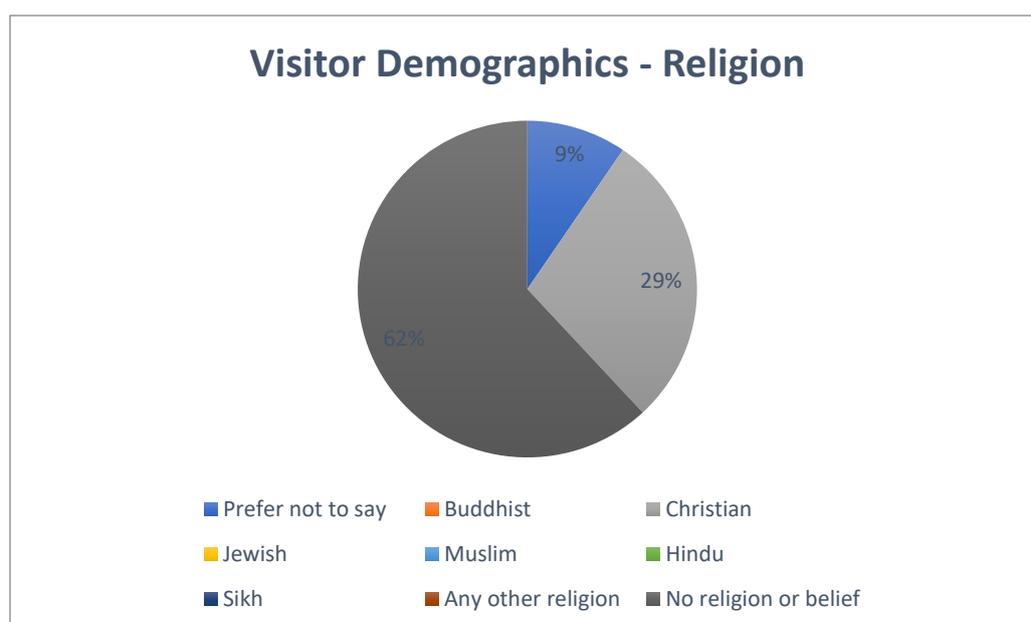
22 Responses were received for this question from paper monitoring questionnaires. 14 (64%) of visitors selected the 25 – 44 category, 7 (32%) 45 – 64 and 1 (4%), 18-24.

Question 3



The reason there are only 21 responses despite 22 questionnaires being handed in is that one of the paper questionnaires was not completely answered as the back page was left blank by the visitor. Therefore, as there is no category for a blank response the data is based on the 21 who did respond to this question. 18 (85%) of visitors selected Heterosexual, 1 (5%) Bi-sexual, 1 (5%) Gay man and 1 (5%) prefer not to say.

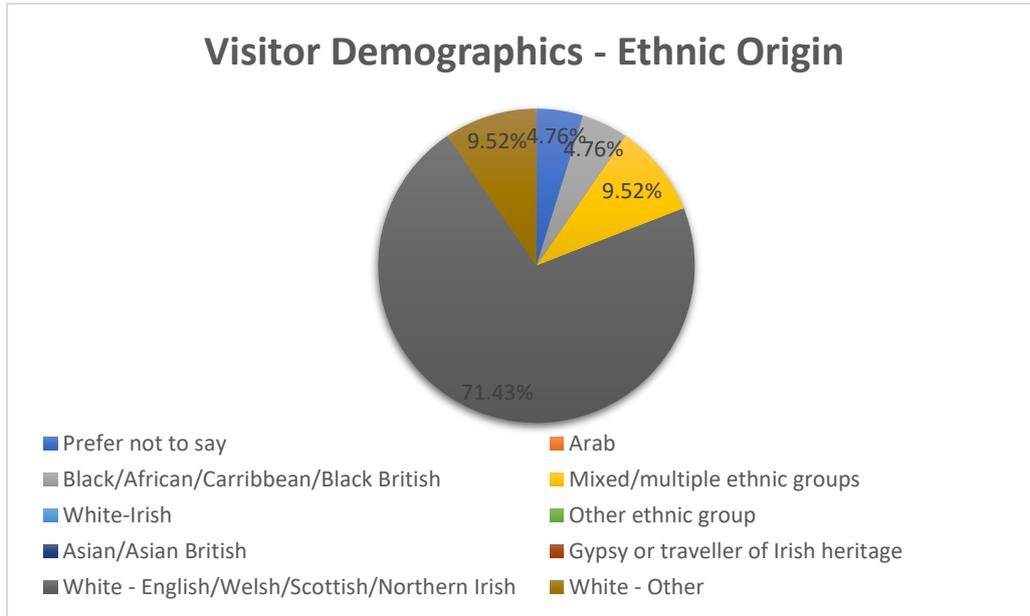
Question 4



The reason there are only 21 responses despite 22 questionnaires being handed in is that one of the paper questionnaires was not completely answered as the back page was left blank by the visitor.

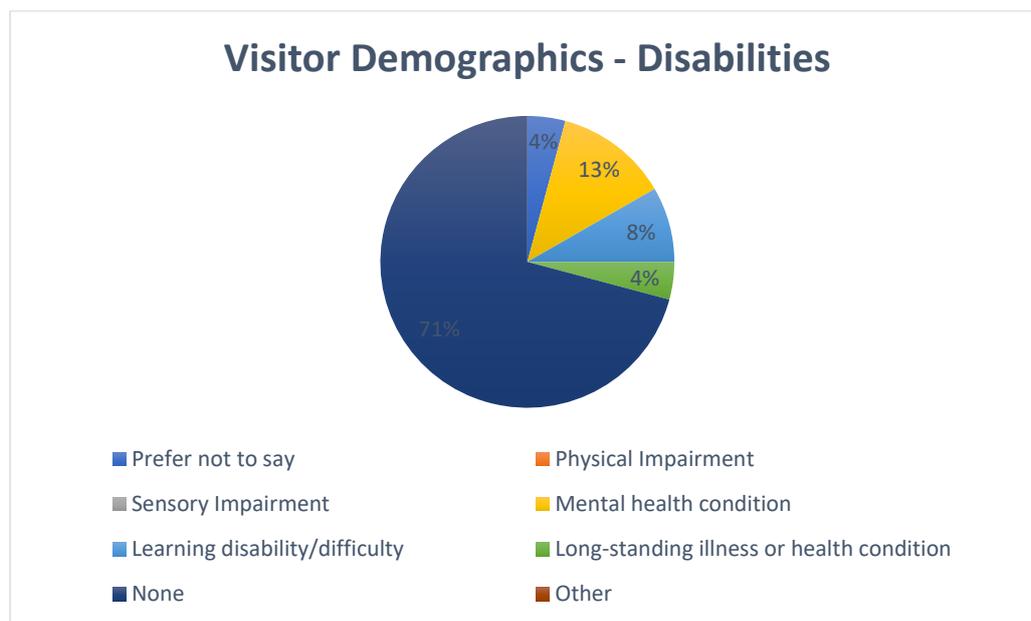
As there is no category for a blank response the data is based on the 21 who did respond to this question. 13 (62%) of visitors selected the “no religion or belief” option, 6 (29%) Christian and 2 (9%) prefer not to say.

Question 5



The reason there are only 21 responses despite 22 questionnaires being handed in is that one of the paper questionnaires was not completely answered as the back page was left blank by the visitor. Therefore, as there is no category for a blank response the data is based on the 21 who did respond to this question. 15 (71%) selected “White – English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish”, 2 (9.52%) “White other”, 2 (9.52%) “Mixed multiple”, 1 “Black/African/Caribbean/Black British” and 1 (4.76%) “prefer not to say.” The visitor who selected “White – Other” wrote on the questionnaire that they were Portuguese.

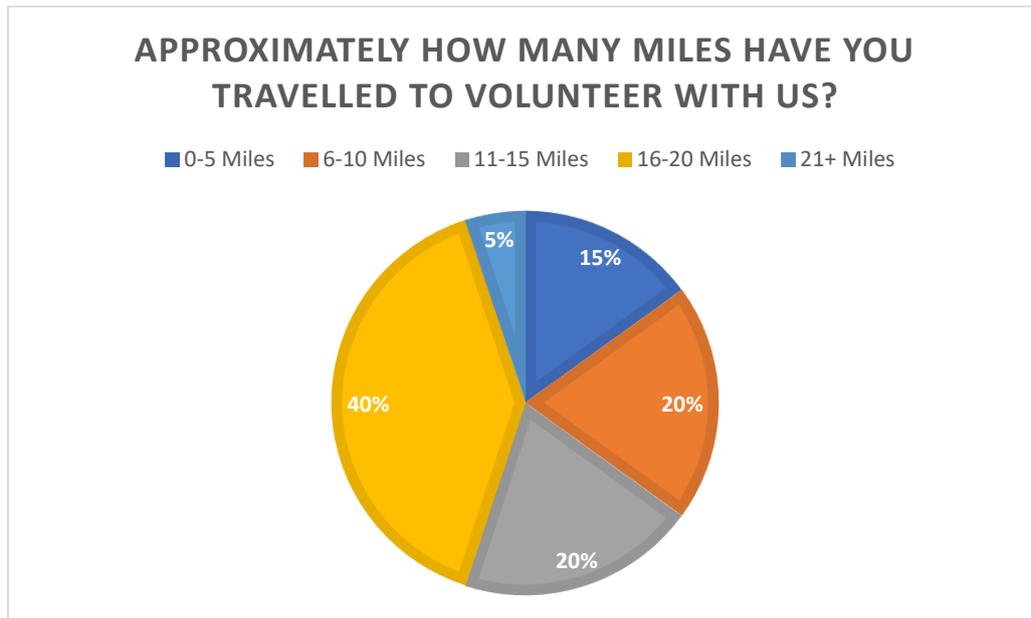
Question 6



The reason there are only 21 responses despite 22 questionnaires being handed in, is that one of the paper questionnaires was not completely answered as the back page was left blank by the visitor. Therefore, as there is no category for a blank response the data is based on the 21 who did respond to this question, however some visitors selected multiple categories to describe their various disabilities'. 17 (71%) of visitors when asked to select the categories which best represented their disabilities selected the "None" category, 3 (13%) "Mental health condition", 2 (8%) "Learning disabilities", 1 (4%) "Long – standing illness or health condition" and 1 (4%) "Prefer not to say".

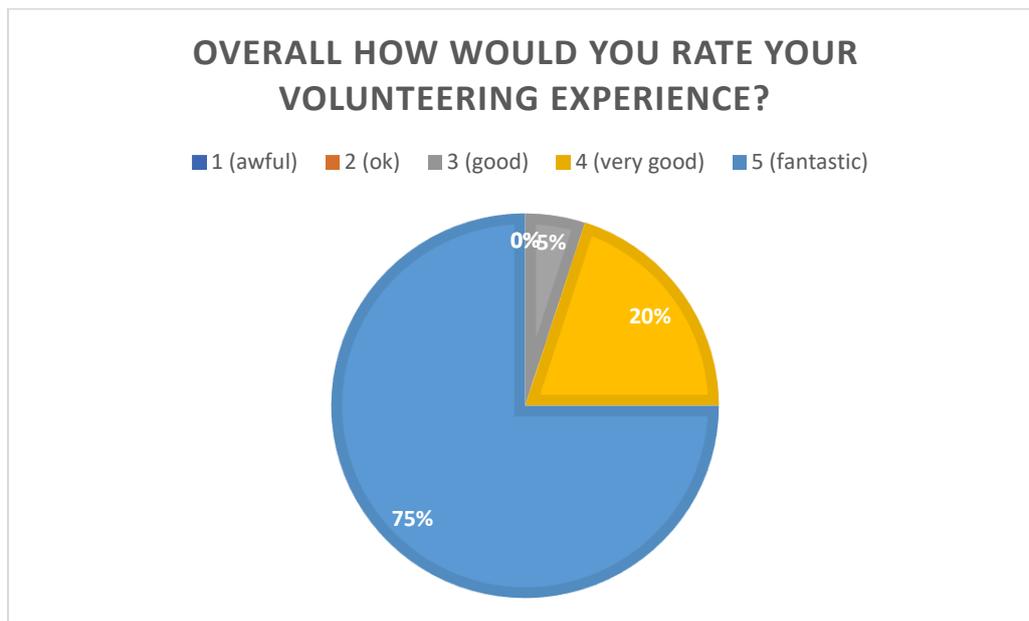
Volunteer Findings from Questionnaire

Question 1



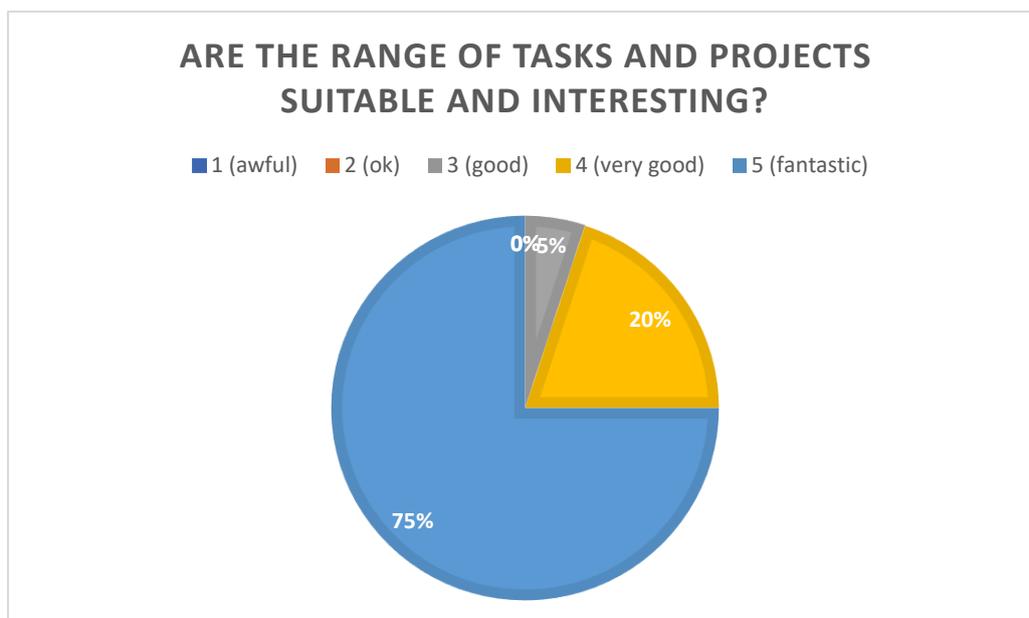
20 responses were received for this question with 14 from the volunteers' paper questionnaires and 6 from the online volunteer's questionnaires. 8 (40%) reported the number of miles they travel to volunteer at the Forest centre is between 16-20 miles, 4 (20%) 11-15 miles, 4 (20%) 11-15 miles, 3 (15%) 0 – 5 Miles and 1 (5%) 21+ Miles.

Question 2



20 responses were received for this question with 14 from the volunteers' paper questionnaires and 6 from the online volunteer's questionnaires. 15 (75%) rated their volunteering experience as fantastic, 4 (20%) very good and 1 (5%) good. 1 volunteer made an extra box which he called 6 and placed a tick into it, therefore I have included his response in the number 5 fantastic category to keep the data consistent.

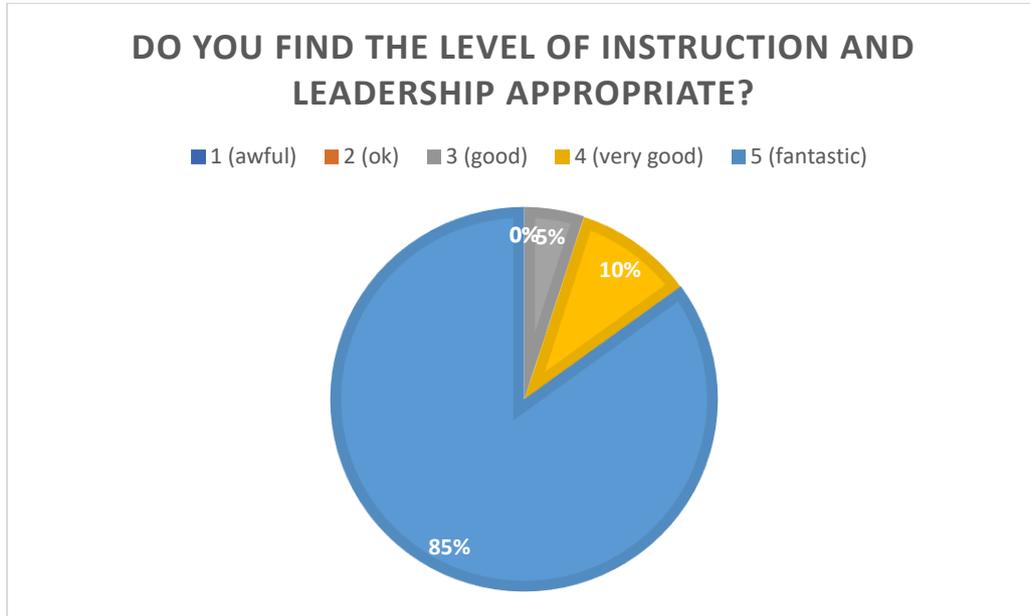
Question 3



20 responses were received for this question with 14 from the volunteers' paper questionnaires and 6 from the online volunteer's questionnaires. When asked "are the range of tasks and projects suitable

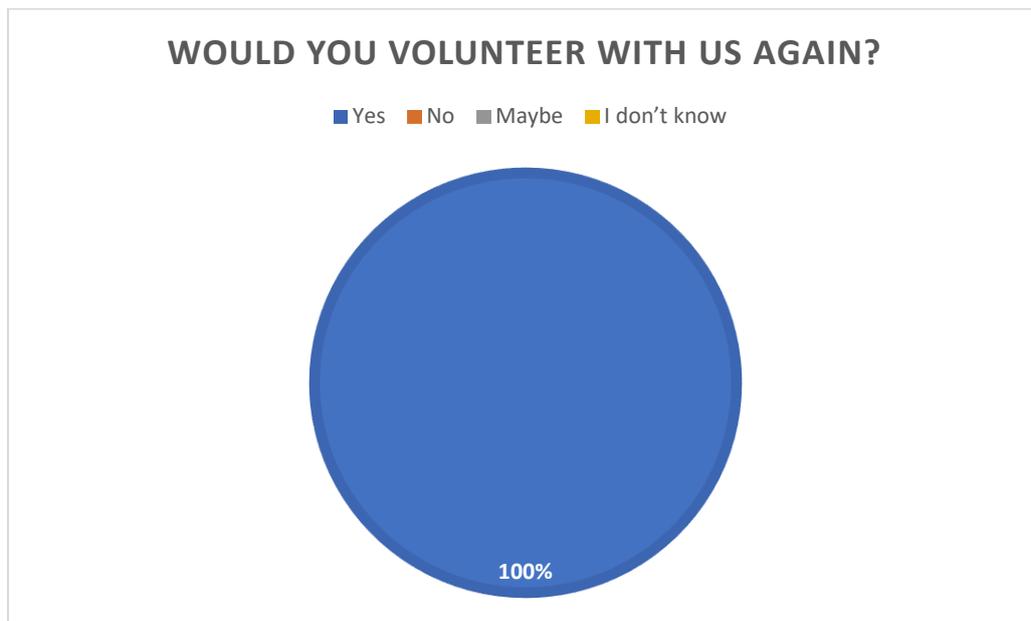
and interesting?” 15 (75%) of respondents rated them as fantastic, 4 (20%) very good and 1 (5%) as good.

Question 4



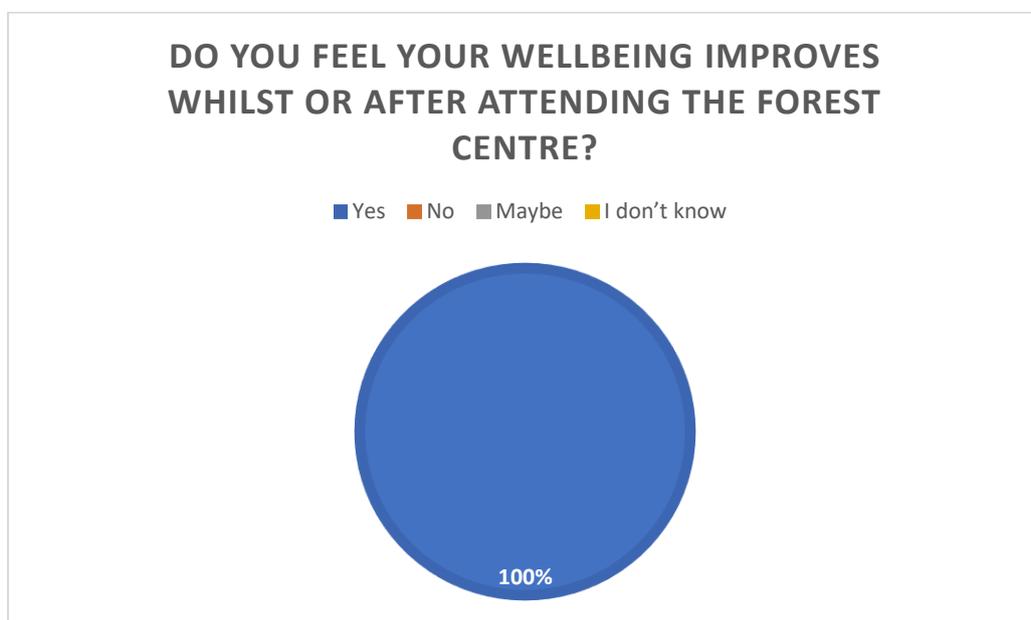
20 responses were received for this question with 14 from the volunteers’ paper questionnaires and 6 from the online volunteer’s questionnaires. The volunteers when asked if they found the level of instruction and leadership appropriate? 17 (85%) reported it was fantastic, 2 (10%) very good and 1 (5%) good.

Question 5



20 responses were received for this question with 14 from the volunteers' paper questionnaires and 6 from the online volunteer's questionnaires. A resounding 20 (100%) reported yes, they would volunteer at the Forest centre again.

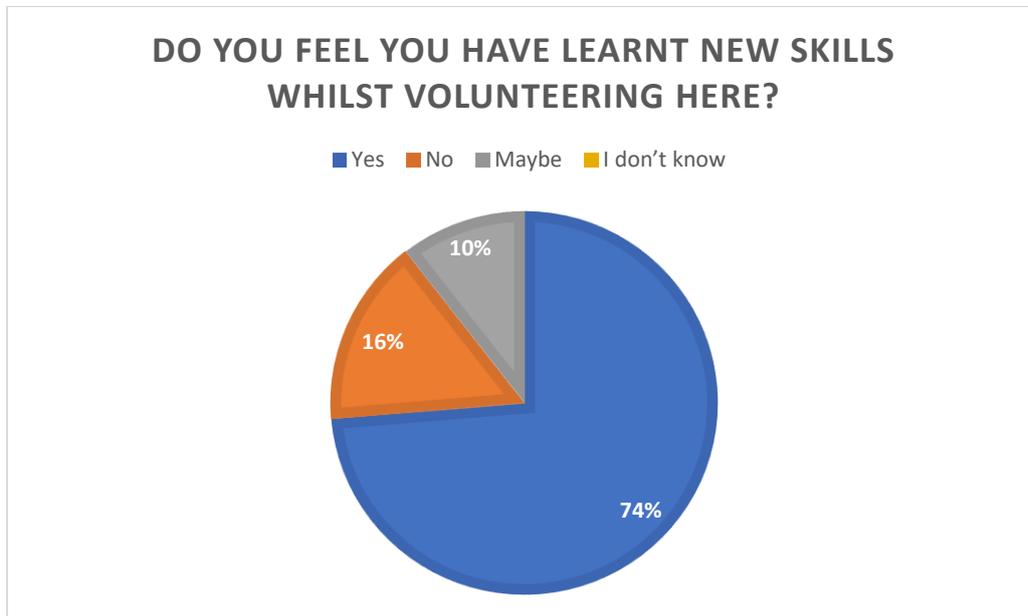
Question 6



19 responses were received for this question with 13 from the volunteers' paper questionnaires and 6 from the online volunteer's questionnaires. 19 (100%) reported yes, they did feel their wellbeing improves whilst or after attending the Forest Centre. The reason there are only 19 responses despite 20 questionnaires being handed in is that one of the paper questionnaires was not completely

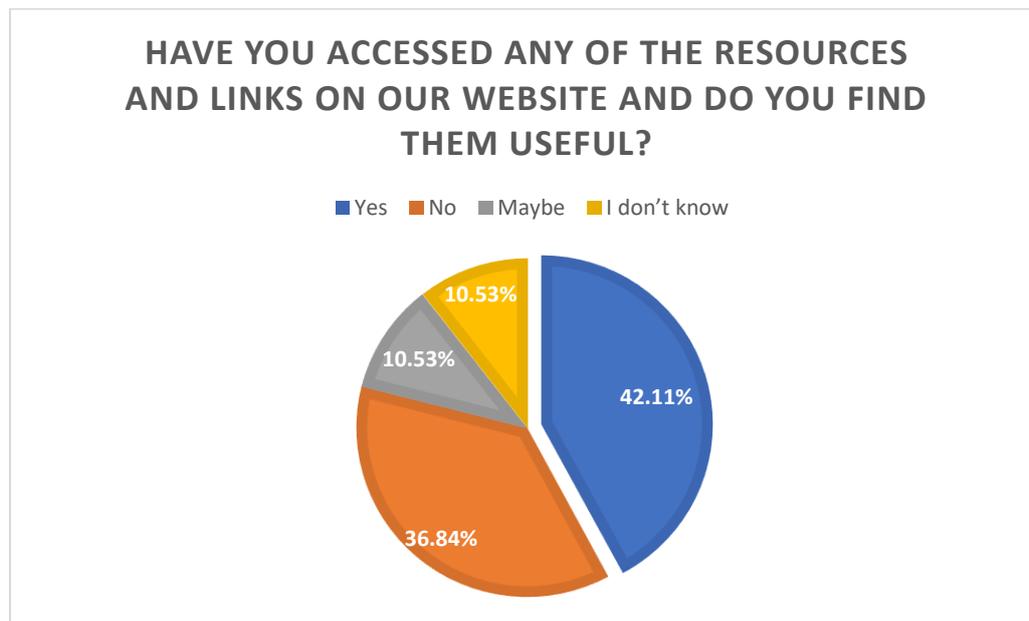
answered as the back page was left blank by the volunteer. Therefore, as there is no category for a blank response the data is based on the 19 (100%) who did respond to this question.

Question 7



19 responses were received for this question with 13 from the volunteers' paper questionnaires and 6 from the online volunteer's questionnaires. The reason there are only 19 responses despite 20 questionnaires being handed in is that one of the paper questionnaires was not completely answered as the back page was left blank by the volunteer. Therefore, as there is no category for a blank response the data is based on the 19 who did respond to this question. 14 (74%) of volunteers answered Yes to the question "do you feel you have learnt new skills whilst volunteering here?", 3 (16%) stated No and 2 (10%) Maybe. One of the volunteers who answered yes wrote in the additional information section, "New skills include learning to use a bill hook & scythe" and another who answered no wrote on the questionnaire "Reinforced existing skill base".

Question 8



19 responses were received for this question with 13 from the volunteers' paper questionnaires and 6 from the online volunteer's questionnaires. The reason there are only 19 responses despite 20 questionnaires being handed in is that one of the paper questionnaires was not completely answered as the back page was left blank by the volunteer. Therefore, as there is no category for a blank response the data is based on the 19 who did respond to this question. 8 (42.11%) of volunteers answered yes to the question "Have you accessed any of the resources and links on our website and do you find them useful?", 7 (36.84%) answered no, 2 (10.53%) maybe and 2 (10.53%) I don't know. One of the volunteers who answered no wrote on the questionnaire "Reinforced existing skill base" and another who answered I don't know wrote "Didn't know there was any".

Additional Volunteer Comments – Paper Questionnaire

Comments taken from the additional Information section of the paper questionnaire

"It would be good to be involved in more ecology – focused wildlife i.e., surveys - both to map the local ecology and learn more about the wildlife here e.g., mushrooms, plants etc"

"I get a real buzz from the work days, often going home shattered but always invigorated and feeling that I have really made a difference. I love it"

"The acceptance of people from all backgrounds is great to see. Just a thought in these days of diversity, are you reaching people from minority communities, also on occasions some male volunteers can take over and it can lead to slight intense feelings, not a big issue but thought worth noting"

"Keep on doing what you are doing"

“It relieves my stress levels being able to do manual labour so certainly improves my wellbeing. Distinguishing trees and understanding why some are better for fires due to the poisons within them. I’ve not accessed the website so don’t know about the resources available”

“Just enjoy being outside in the woods and learning along the way”

Additional Volunteer Comments – Online Questionnaire

Comments taken from the additional Information section of the online questionnaire

“It would be nice if volunteers could access the arboretum during days when not volunteering to be able to appreciate the peace and atmosphere without wielding a scythe or billet hook, I for one would love to be able to photograph the flora and fauna when a lot quieter”

“I’ve been volunteering with you sporadically for several years. More recently I’ve become a trustee of Avon Needs Trees, another charity with lottery heritage funding. I’ve learnt a lot from your approach and its very useful in my ANT role”

“Just wanted to say this: I have been volunteering here for four years now and am impressed with the soundness and staying power of this project and I think that really speaks to the qualities of the leadership and team. From modest beginnings there has been a slow but solid development, with improvements made gradually on limited funding, but all adding up to make something really wonderful. (Tortworth Forest Centre stands out to me in this way as I’ve also been involved with an equally well-meaning but overambitious and badly managed CIC that collapsed after spending a lot of grant money, with little to show for it. This is sort of the opposite)”

“Thanks to the organisers for being patient, trusting and informative. I really like their approach to teaching use of new tools in particular: it’s quite simple, not overly laboured. Just a straightforward explanation of the technique’s and associated risks and then they let you get on with it for a bit, Its quite empowering!”

“I’m learning lots about the arboretum and this learning is delivered in a jargon free way, which lets you take as much or as little detail as you like from it”

“Keep up the good work”

“I feel that my skills of observation are improving and there is so much to learn by being in the arboretum. The physical tasks I have gained include chopping wood and using a billhook safely and efficiently”

Volunteer Comment - "Why do you volunteer with us?"

"To keep active and busy, whilst feeling that you are contributing towards something important, enriching a local habitat. Great feeling of enrichment"

"Out in the woods feeds the soul. Exercise, contrast with professional responsibilities with day job. Interest in nature"

"I enjoy working outside as it is so different from my regular work. It also negates the need for gym membership"

"Helping towards a good cause while being out in nature"

"To get out of Bristol"

"Because it keeps me sane – being outside in a beautiful setting working with nature. I feel useful and connected to [word illegible] and the woods. Just breathing good air is good for my body and soul – but having the opportunity to be part of a team. Woodland – contributes enormously to my wellbeing. Tuesday is the best day of my week"

"Wanted to do something for the community, not sure what that is for others. I like being outdoors in a natural environment"

"Provides me with a sense of wellbeing. Giving to community without need to get over involved with the organisation of things. I find the inclusive and kind approach to volunteers exceptional. Leadership is provided in a way you hardly notice, allowing people to try new things in a safe environment and gently guiding to the correct technique. Superb!"

"A day of exercise, fresh air, good companionship and making a difference"

"My real job is in front of a screen so I like to get outside as much as possible, also I'd like to enhance my knowledge about forestry"

"Thank you for the experience"

"Nice productive days in the woods"

"Diversity, friendship, gain knowledge, mindfulness, fun, keep fit, fresh air, inspiration, feed the goats!"

"Spending time in nature, doing something for a good cause"

"It's nice being able to help towards something that will be enjoyed for years to come that doesn't need wifi, or switching on"

"Outdoor exercise and connection with nature. Meeting new people. Learning new skills and about the natural world. Help the environment"

"Spending time in nature/countryside/away from the city, feeling useful, physical exercise, continuing to learn about wildlife and botany, as a semi-professional, meeting people"

“To get out of the city into the countryside, to meet others with similar interests, to learn about woodland to get out in the fresh air”

“To help combat mental ill health, and to give myself both a sense of achievement and something positive in my life”

Question 1

Why do you volunteer at the Forest Centre?

“Number of reasons, I spent my whole working life looking after other people as I was a nurse and I taught nurses and I retired 4 years ago and I thought I’d be volunteering at a hospice caring for people, as I wanted to do some voluntary work. I go to the gym here at Tortworth and I happened to see a van here for the forest centre and I looked it up and I came for one day and on the first day I actually thought I don’t want to go and care for other people any more I just want to care for me” and it was very peaceful [...] the trees there’s just something about that connection with nature that made me feel good. And there weren’t that many people here and I’m a great socialiser and talker and will listen to people but I don’t do that here I don’t ask people how they are. I don’t engage in their lives at all I do this purely for me”.

“Well, I think at the moment it’s keeping me sane I love it, I do a Tuesday as well so it gives me a chance to be outside in a beautiful setting and to be useful and be part of a team and I love doing manual, physical work. It ticks all the boxes for my wellbeing being out in nature and being with people and learning stuff as well. Although I don’t know where I can take my scything skills (Smile).”

Question 2

How does Volunteering at the Forest Centre make you feel?

“Because especially with Covid, life’s quite stressful It just gives mental wellbeing, it just makes me feel better and physically you feel like you’re doing something for your physical health as well. [...] initially I said I didn’t talk to people you get to notice people who come so there is a sort of sense of feeling you’re doing something nice for other people. Like the open day it’s nice to hear that lots of people came and enjoyed it but it gives you a sense that you’re doing something for the environment for the greater good really. Whatever the greater good is?”.

“Sane and grounded and it gives me particularly during these uncertain times when a lot of the things I do have gone”. I asked is that during Covid? And they replied “yes being able to come here it’s something I can go regularly and it gives me motivation it’s something to sort of structure the rest of my week around. And even just breathing good air for a day, physiologically has a beneficial effect”.

Question 3

Have you learnt anything new by volunteering at the Forest Centre and if so what?

“Oh yeah well just today I learnt I couldn’t even tell you the name of the tool it’s a sharp tool how to cut a log in half, I’ve learnt about different saws, I’ve learnt about different trees and why they grow

and about the arboretum and the history. Quite a lot actually and some of it I was a scout leader for years so some of it has blended with what I already knew but I think just certain skills with tools and things about the trees as Jakes very knowledgeable about the different trees and where they've come from so those sorts of things, I've enjoyed learning about and when we first came mapping, I had no idea how to map trees, so that was interesting".

"I have learnt to use a range of traditional tools and how to sharpen them, fire lighting skills that was largely through the hawthorn project though and learning about trees and learning about nature in general because you've got some real knowledge in the people who run this so I've learnt an awful lot about nature".

Question 4

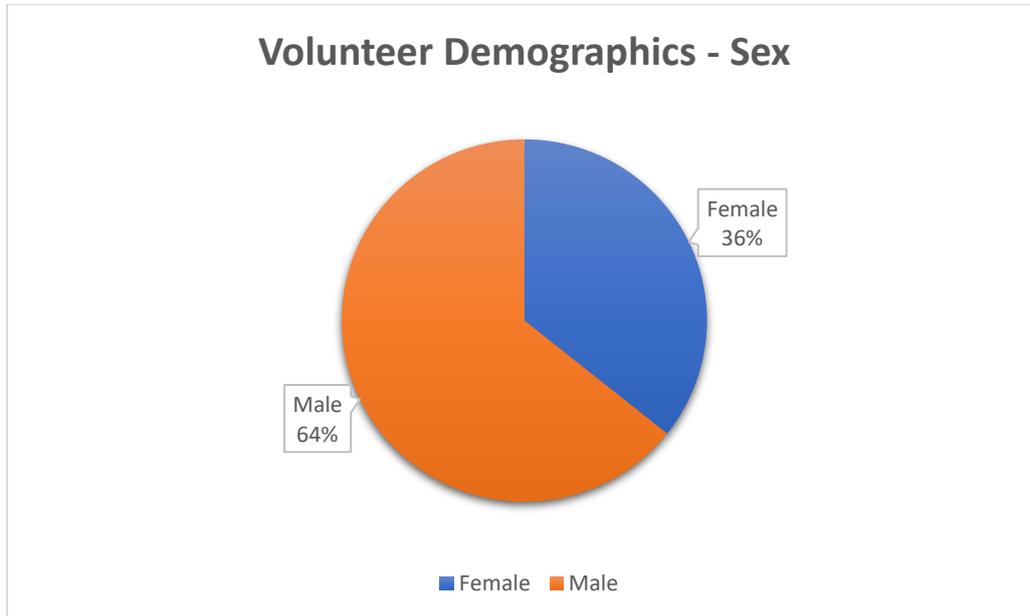
Has your attitude towards the natural environment changed because of your volunteering at this Forest Centre and if yes how?

"I think the bigger change is when I first came here, I was one of those volunteers who said [...] I think we should make a lot of money out of this we could get a lot of people visiting you could make it a really commercial venture. Then I thought, actually no its about it being a tranquil place and for people to come and rest and just be and not feel like Westonbirt with a café it doesn't need to make money it just needs to be accessible for people who want to come and just chill, I think".

"I didn't re connect with nature by coming here initially but it has really deepened that connection I would say".

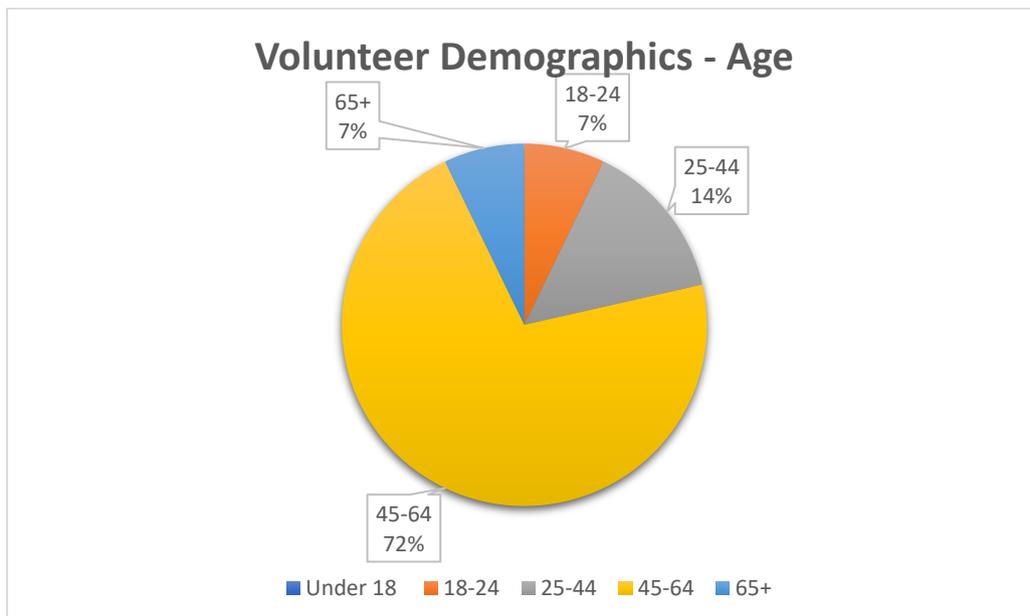
Volunteer Demographics Monitoring Questionnaire

Question 1



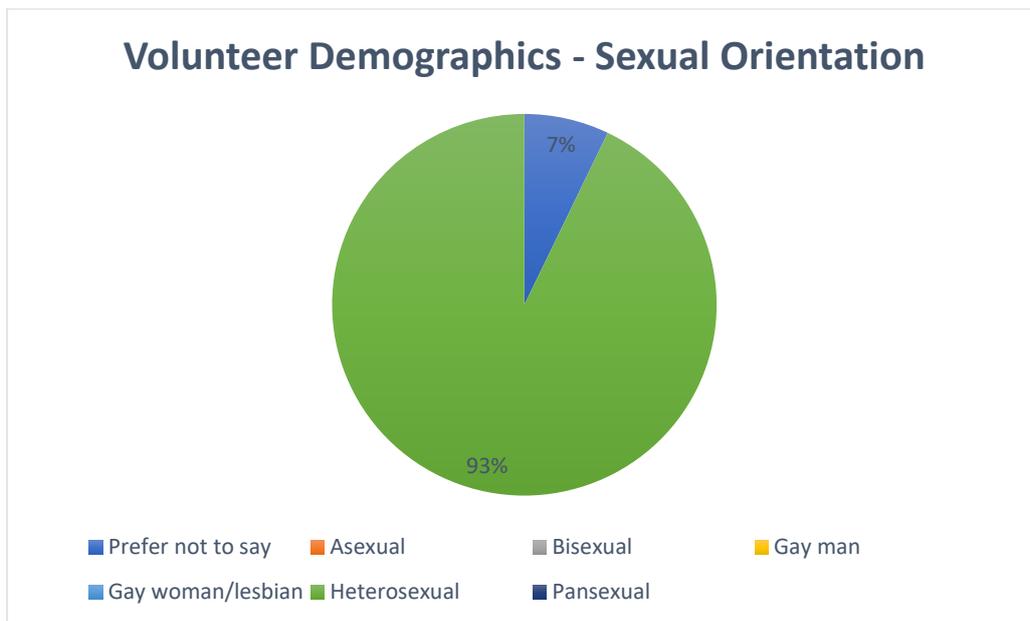
14 Responses were received for this question from paper monitoring questionnaires. 9 (64%) of volunteers selected male and 5 (36%), female.

Question 2



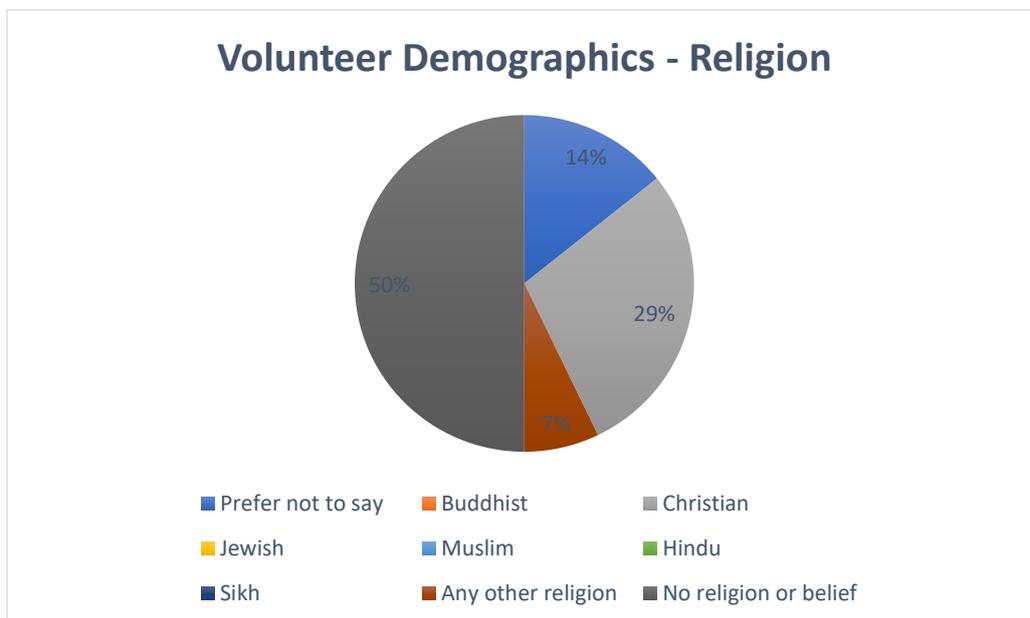
14 Responses were received for this question from paper monitoring questionnaires. 10 (72%) of volunteers selected the 45-64 age, 2 (14%) the 25-44 age, 1 (7%) the 18-24 and 1 (7%) the 65+.

Question 3



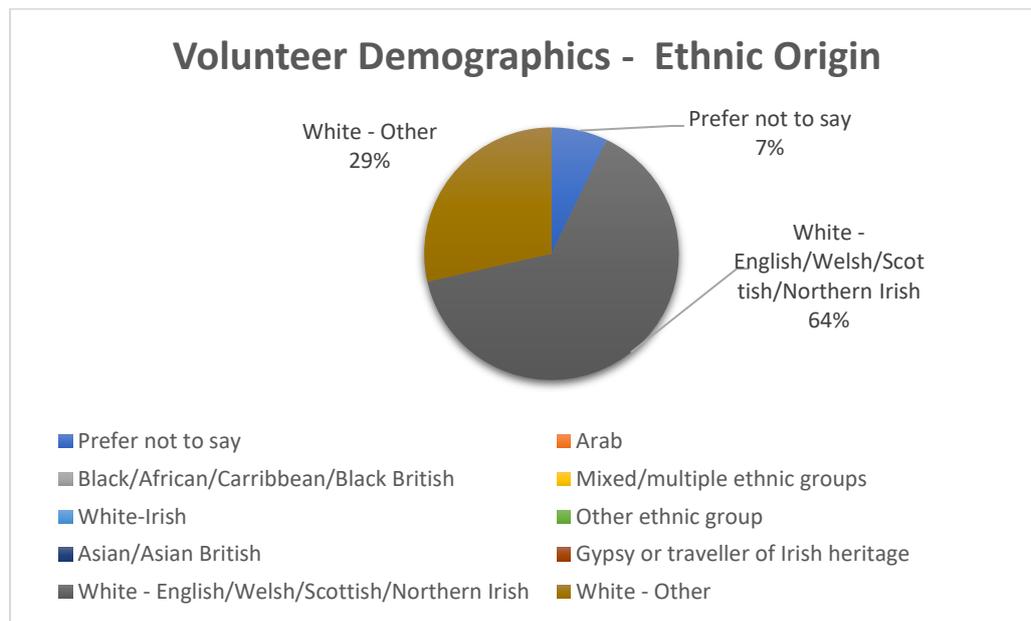
14 Responses were received for this question from paper monitoring questionnaires. 13 (93%) of volunteers selected heterosexual and 1 (7%) the prefer not to say box.

Question 4



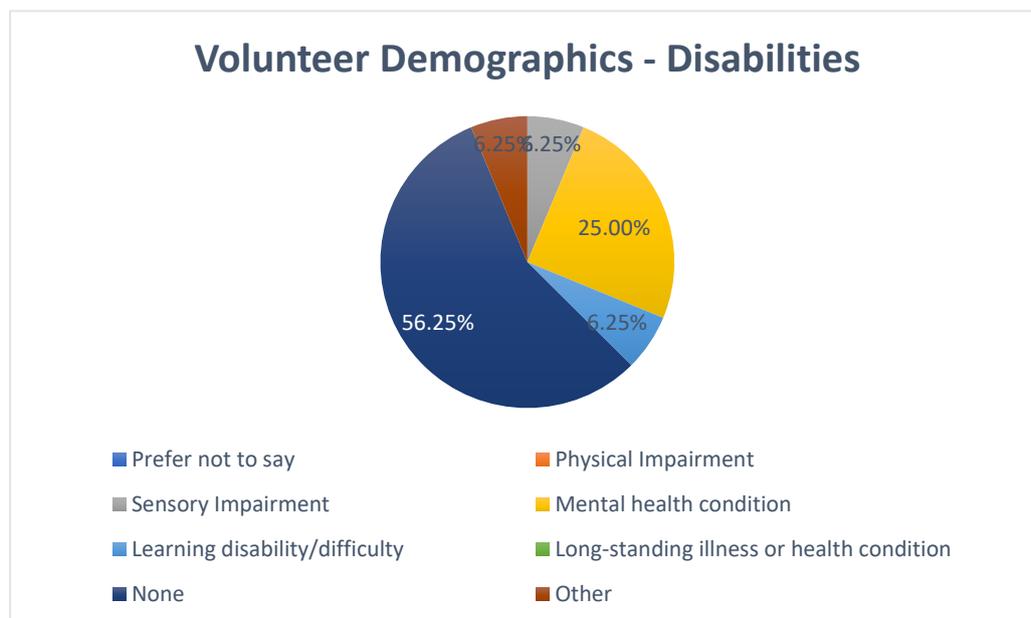
14 Responses were received for this question from paper monitoring questionnaires. 7 (50%) of volunteers selected no religion or belief, 4 (29%) Christian, 2 (14%) prefer not to say and 1 (7%) selected any other religion.

Question 5



14 Responses were received for this question from paper monitoring questionnaires. 9 (64%) of volunteers selected white – English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish, 4 (29%) white -other and 3 wrote on the questionnaire when asked to please state, “European”, “Italian/Canadian” and “German” and 1 left it blank.

Question 6



14 volunteers responded to this question, however some volunteers selected multiple categories to describe their various disabilities’. Volunteers were asked to select a category to describe their disability 9 (56%) of volunteers selected none, 4 (25%) mental health condition, 1 (6.25%) sensory, 1

(6.25%) learning disability/difficulty and 1 (6.25%) other. In addition, one of the volunteers who selected sensory impairment wrote on the questionnaire “mild, just hearing aids”, another who selected mental health wrote “anxiety/stress” and “fibromyalgia” was written by a volunteer who selected other.

Findings from College Questionnaire

Question 1

Approximately how many miles have you travelled to visit Tortworth Forest Centre?

Options: 0-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21+

Answer: 16-20

Question 2

Overall, how would you rate your group’s experience?

Options: awful, ok, good, very good, fantastic

Answer: fantastic

Question 3

Were the range of activities suitable and relevant to your group’s needs?

Options: awful, ok, good, very good, fantastic

Answer: very good

Question 4

Do you find the level of instruction and leadership appropriate?

Options: awful, ok, good, very good, fantastic

Answer: very good

Question 5

Why did you book a visit with us?

Answer: "It was part of the groups college course to support their local environment and community. Alongside this they have to complete work experience/volunteering hours to achieve their college certificate".

Question 6

Do you feel your student's wellbeing improved whilst at or after attending the Forest Centre?

Options: yes, no, maybe, don't know

Answers: yes, maybe

If so, please give examples: "It enabled the group to be away from a classroom environment which they often struggle with. It also helped build their confidence completing tasks that they wouldn't have had the opportunity to try in a classroom setting".

Question 7

Do you feel that your students have learnt any new skills from attending the Forest Centre?

Options: yes, no, maybe, don't know

Answer: Yes

If so, please give examples: "They were able to use hand tools to carry out tasks".

Question 8

Do you feel attending the Forest Centre has helped to improve your student's knowledge of woodland and given them a better understanding of our natural world?

Answer: maybe, don't know

If so, please give examples: "I would hope that they did gain some knowledge especially that trees are gnarly".

Discussion

The data suggests that just under half of the visitors who attended the open day and completed a questionnaire, live locally as 15 (48%) reported they live 0-5 miles away. There is an even split between the visitors who live 6-10 and 16-20 miles away with 6 visitors (19%) in each category and also another even split with 2 visitors (7%) travelling between 11-15 and 21+ miles to attend the open day. In comparison the volunteer's data shows the greater number of volunteers live 16-20 miles away and 4 (20%) are split between 6-10 and 11-15 miles with only 3 (15%) out of the 20 volunteers living locally. This may be due to the Forest Centre already having good connections with various organisations within Bristol, which is approx. 18 miles away and a mini bus is provided by the Forest Centre to transport the volunteers from Bristol to the Forest Centre and then back to Bristol.

The data also suggests that the biggest proportion of visitors found out about the Forest Centre through social media 11 (36%) and 9 (29%) word of mouth with school newsletter 4 (13%) the other categories were verily evenly spread. Interestingly the local event website and search engines options were zero therefore the use of the local events website and search engines for advertising the Forest Centre are the areas which need to be improved upon.

It is clear to see that all the visitors enjoyed their visit to the Forest Centre as when asked "how was your visit?" 22 (71%) selecting the fantastic option and 9 (29%) the ok option. This is further backed up by 27 (100%) of all visitors saying they would visit again and the specific comments written in the additional information section of the questionnaire, one visitor commented "a really wonderful visit", another that they felt it was a "stunningly beautiful forest" and another wrote "enjoyed our visit, glad we know about this place now!". This is further supported by the comments from the recorded visitor's interviews data for the question "how does visiting the Forest Centre make you feel?". One visitor commented "it just means you can switch off a bit from a lot of other things [...] he's 5 and he's just really happy exploring and not having other things that restrict him [...] I think for him it's a massive thing and for me as a parent its really nice to see him exploring and just let his instincts guide him really". Another visitor commented, "I feel really relaxed and serene, peaceful and just lovely, really lovely" a teenager who visited with their parent also commented "well I think it has made me feel very relaxed it's definitely like it's just all so beautiful it just makes you feel so calm and really relaxed". Interestingly the volunteers when asked a similar question in the recorded volunteer interviews, re iterated similar sentiments by commenting "[...] especially with Covid, life's quite stressful it just gives mental wellbeing, it just makes me feel better" another explained how they felt "sane and grounded and it gives me particularly during these uncertain times when a lot of the things I do have gone [...] being able to come here is something I can do regularly and it gives me motivation it's something to [...] structure the rest of my week around [...] just breathing good air for a day, physiologically has a beneficial effect".

The activities provided at the Forest Centre during the open day events were rated by the majority of visitor's as being fantastic by 17 (65%) of visitors and 9 (27%) thought they were very good and 3 (8%) good. One visitor did however not select a category as they wrote that they "wasn't booked in". In the additional information section of the questionnaire visitors also wrote various comments for instance "really loved the event. The activities were superb – Thanks" and another said "[...] we enjoyed going around and collecting the seeds it made us explore". "Beautiful forest, really enjoyed the folk music as well – and the goats!" and another visitor "my two children really enjoyed the open day, unfortunately the booked activities were fully booked but the hunts were fantastic. Sign posts could

be improved, great forest- great day!". Three visitors also wrote specifically about a bat and moth spotting evening and the activities provided, one commented "we had a great time", they also gave some suggestions which may be beneficial to the Tortworth Forest team regarding the possibility of "more mini activities around the site would be great i.e. – swing was good". The second visitor also suggested "perhaps the event could be slightly earlier so the likelihood of bats being about would be more in our favour. Covid permitting". The third visitor commented that they had "a great event" despite the fact that "the weather meant not a huge number of bats or moths" as they felt "it was wonderful to be out in the woodlands with nature at night".

It is important also to mention that two visitors commented on the people running the events as one wrote "volunteers are very knowledgeable" and another "such knowledgeable and passionate guides".

Visitors were also asked to rate the maps provided and any additional handouts/information given during the open day event and 28 (90%) of visitors selected yes, they thought they were helpful and 3 (10%) selected maybe. Comments from visitors in the additional information section stated "good information, especially re the bugs" and another visitor wrote "the children enjoyed following the map and exploring". One visitor from the recorded visitor interviews interestingly reflected on the different approach they felt the Forest Centre used "[...] it's not like going for a walk in the woods in the normal sense and also being invited to come in and learn about the trees is quite different, like having the map and knowing if we go over here, we can see that particular type of tree". However, 1 visitor did comment "make maps easier to follow with more info".

The number of visitors who reported their wellbeing improves whilst or after attending the Forest Centre was very high with 27 (94%) and this was reflected in the volunteer's response to the same question who gave a resounding 19 (100%). Data from the recorded visitor's interviews support this also with one visitor reporting "[...] it has made me feel very relaxed it's definitely like it's just all so beautiful it just makes you feel so calm and really relaxed" and another commented "I feel really relaxed and serene, peaceful and just lovely, really lovely". In addition, one volunteer reported in the additional information section "It relieves my stress levels being able to do manual labour so certainly improves my wellbeing" and another agrees "out in the woods feeds the soul". Various volunteers used the "Why do you volunteer with us", comments section to discuss their wellbeing "because it keeps me sane – being outside in a beautiful setting working with nature. I feel useful and connected [...]. Just breathing good air is good for my body and soul – but having the opportunity to be part of a team. Woodland – contributes enormously to my wellbeing" another adds "provides me with a sense of wellbeing. Giving to community without need to get over involved with the organisation of things. I find the inclusive and kind approach to volunteers exceptional". In addition, volunteers reported during the recorded interview's how "its ticks all the boxes for my wellbeing being out in nature and being with people and learning stuff as well" and another added "because especially with Covid, life's quite stressful it just gives mental wellbeing, it just makes me feel better"

When visitors were asked on the questionnaire "do you feel visiting the Forest Centre has helped to improve your knowledge of woodlands and given you a better understanding of our natural world" 27 (87%) answered yes. This was further explored during the recorded visitor interviews where one visitor reported how the Forest Centre has reminded her to look at woodlands and the natural world more positively despite all the negative press around climate change "[...] I think in parallel to coming here I've been thinking a lot more this year with the strange year we've been having about getting more involved with the natural world and its sort of reminded me coming here about that I don't want to look on the world like the climate change and all of that sounds like it's a disaster and coming here

you realise throughout history people have worked with the plants and alongside the plants and this is a place where humans have taken seeds and saplings and planted them into the ground in order to make a beautiful garden and it's a lot less disastrous – do you know what I mean – like here is a place where we are not living as if it's a disaster we can be proactive and put in a new forest together and that seems like a much healthier energy [...]". In addition this visitor due to the positive experiences added "because of the feeling of the place I think we will be coming back because it has such a nice community feeling to it". Another visitor reported "I think we had quite a good attitude anyway to be honest but I think it's made you aware of how beautiful nature can be if you don't do all the bad things to it, like chop things down". another visitor when asked the same question replied "I don't think so because I love the natural environment especially this time of year when all the trees are just letting go and changing colour so I don't think it's changed no

Furthermore the volunteers were asked during their recorded interviews a similar question "has your attitude toward the natural environment changed because of your volunteering at this Forest Centre and if yes how?" and one volunteer interestingly talked about her views on over commercialisation of woodlands "I think the bigger change is when I first came here, I was one of those volunteers who said [...] I think we should make a lot of money out of this we could get a lot of people visiting you could make it a really commercial venture. Then I thought, actually no its about it being a tranquil place and for people to come and rest and just be and not feel like Westonbirt with a café it doesn't need to make money it just needs to be accessible for people who want to come and just chill, I think". Interestingly this sentiment was also discussed by a visitor during the recorded interviews "there's something about it being proactively used by people and not just ornamentally, so seeing the volunteers, having the fire going and the human aliveness its really warm and welcoming. It's hard to describe the feeling it's almost like walking into a village, most woods you go to its like there's the woods and there's the people and the people are like extracting an experience from the woods but when you come here you can see the people are in collaboration with the woodland so your' coming to enter into that and when you come in you also become part of that". In addition, another volunteer reported "I didn't re-connect with nature by coming here initially but it has really deepened that connection I would say".

When asked "what sort of events would you like to attend here in the future?" the events selected were relatively evenly spread with wildlife events coming out slightly higher, closely followed by craft, family activities and guided walks with storytelling and family camps coming in slightly lower. Interestingly volunteering was one of the lowest events selected therefore I would suggest this needs to be explored further with the possibility of using different advertising mediums to encourage more visitors to volunteer.

During the recorded interviews visitors were asked "have you learnt anything new by visiting the Forest Centre and if so what?" one visitor replied "we've just never had quite a few of the experiences that we are having like touching these different types of trees, we did some leaf rubbings and picked up some different colour leaves. For me as an adult in our party I learnt that there's loads more oak tree types than I realised [...]. So yeah, lots of things that are new, so there's that type of knowledge [...] there's also the feeling knowledge of walking around in the woods and seeing how different trees and plants live together [...] so not taking them as isolated things as well". Another visitor spoke about how she had learnt more about the arboretum "I knew there was an arboretum here but I didn't know anything about it, I didn't know it was like closed all the time or most of the time so I've learnt now that you can't just come and walk around the arboretum you have to wait until there's a day when its open"

The volunteers when asked to rate their experiences of volunteering at the Forest Centre all rated it high with 15 (75%) selecting fantastic and 4 (very good) 1(5%) good. This positive result was also reflected in other relevant questions for instance when asked “are the range of tasks and projects suitable and interesting?” the responses were all high and “do you find the level of instruction and leadership appropriate?” again all the volunteers selected good or above with 17 (85%) selecting fantastic. The volunteer’s positive responses continued when asked “do you feel you have learnt new skills whilst volunteering here?” 14 (74%) selected yes, however 3 (16%) selected no and 2 (10%) maybe. Various comments from the additional information section of the volunteer’s questionnaire supported these findings for instance “I get a real buzz from the work days, often going home shattered but always invigorated and feeling that I have really made a difference. I love it”. “Thanks to the organisers for being patient, trusting and informative. I really like their approach to teaching use of new tools in particular: it’s quite simple, not overly laboured”, “I’m learning lots about the arboretum and this learning is delivered in a jargon free-way which lets you take as much or as little detail as you like from it”. In addition, a couple of volunteers offered some suggestions to improve their experiences at the Forest Centre “it would be good to be involved in more ecology – focused wildlife i.e., surveys – both to map the local ecology and learn more about the wildlife here e.g. mushrooms, plants etc” and “It would be nice if volunteers could access the arboretum during days when not volunteering to be able to appreciate the peace and atmosphere without wielding a scythe or billet hook”. I am aware that the Forest Centre during December did organise an event for the volunteers to attend and enjoy the Forest without having to carry out volunteering tasks.

The volunteer’s response’s when asked “have you accessed any of the resources and links on our website and do you find them useful?” were fairly evenly matched with 8 (42.11%) answering yes and 7 (36.84%) answering no and 2 (10.53%) maybe and I don’t know. Although it is not clear from the data whether this is because they were aware of the resources and links on the website but did not want to access them or if they were not made aware of the information available to them. Therefore, more investigation needs to be done by the Forest Centre team to further explore this question.

To collect demographic information a visitors and volunteers Equalities Monitoring Form was produced and distributed by the Forest Centre team in order to satisfy one of the areas identified within the National Lottery Grants for Heritage report, (section 3f Section four: project outcomes a. A wider range of people will be involved in heritage). The demographics information gathered by the questionnaire suggests that the majority of visitors are female 16 (73%) and in contrast the higher percentage of volunteers are male 9 (64%). However, the fact that the data suggests more women attended the open day than men may be due to a higher percentage of women volunteering to complete the questionnaire and participate in the recorded interviews than men. Interestingly whilst carrying out the recorded interviews I did notice that there were a number of volunteers who were with a male partner, however the male partner declined to participate. Therefore, in order to gather more comprehensive data in the future it would be beneficial to ask the participant’s how many people are visiting with them and what sex they are.

The data suggests that the greater age of visitors 14(64%) was in the category, 25–44yrs and 7 (32%) was aged 45-64yrs with only a small percentage 1 (4%) aged 18-24yrs. Therefore, it would be useful to look at ways of attracting more visitors from the age bracket 18-24yrs, perhaps by broadening the use of social media platforms to include ones which younger people access. Interestingly the data also suggests that this is true of volunteers as the age group 18-24yrs has the lowest percentage of 1 (7%) of people volunteering, therefore it would be beneficial to use the same tactics to increase the number

of both younger visitors and volunteers to the Forest Centre. Therefore, it would be beneficial for the Forest Centre team to do more research on other social media platforms which younger people use.

The data also suggests the sexual orientation of visitors to the Forest centre is mostly heterosexual with only 1 (5%) of visitors being bi-sexual and 1 (5%) Gay and 1 preferring not to say. Likewise, the data suggests 13 (93%) of volunteers are heterosexual with 1 (7%) preferring not to say. Therefore, to continue adhering to the National Lottery Grants for Heritage mandatory project outcome a. A wider range of people will be involved in heritage, I would suggest further input is required by the Forest Centre team to look at ways to improve the number of visitors and volunteers attending from all sexual orientations.

When asked to select religion demographics, the evidence suggests that 13 (62%) of visitors selected no religion or belief and 6 (29%) Cristian with 2 (9%) preferring not to say. In comparison the volunteers' results were similar as when asked the same question 7 (50%) selected no religion or belief, 4 (29%) Christian, 2 (14%) preferred not to say and 1 (7%) selected any other religion. Therefore, I would once again suggest that in order to continue adhering to the National Lottery Grants for Heritage mandatory project outcome a. A wider range of people will be involved in heritage, further input is required by the Forest Centre team to look at ways to improve the number of visitors and volunteers from a broader range of religions and beliefs attending.

The data further suggests for the demographics of ethnic origin question that the majority of visitors 15 (71%) were from the White – English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish origin, with the rest verily evenly spread between other different ethnic origins. The volunteers' data suggests that once again the majority of volunteers 9 (64%) are from White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish origin, however there were 4 (29%) who selected white – other and wrote on the questionnaire when asked to state their origin, European, Italian/Canadian and German. Therefore, I would once again suggest that in order to continue adhering to the National Lottery Grants for Heritage mandatory project outcome a. A wider range of people will be involved in heritage, further input is required by the Forest Centre team to look at ways to continue increasing the number of visitors and volunteers from broader ethnic demographic origins attending.

Furthermore, from the demographic disabilities section of the questionnaire the data suggests that the greater proportion 17 (71%) of visitors had no disabilities, with 3 (13%) selecting mental health condition, 2 (8%) learning disabilities, 1 (4%) long – standing illness or health condition and 1 (4%) preferring not to say. In addition, the findings from the volunteers' data shows 9 (56%) selecting none, 4 (25%) mental health, 1 (6.25%) sensory (hearing aids), 1 (6.25%) learning disability/difficulty and 1 (6.25%) selected other and wrote fibromyalgia. At first glance it would be easy to assume that the volunteers have a slightly higher number of volunteers with disabilities however some participants from both visitors and volunteers have selected more than one category therefore we cannot assume this to be the case. Nonetheless, it is accurate to assume that there is a percentage of both visitors and volunteers who attend/attended the Forest Centre who do have a disability and a mental health condition was indicated as the main disability, however this number is considerably lower than people attending with no disability. Consequently, once again I would suggest in order to continue adhering to the National Lottery Grants for Heritage mandatory project outcome a. A wider range of people will be involved in heritage, further input is required by the Forest Centre team to look at ways to increase the numbers of visitors and volunteers with disabilities in the future.

Finally, the data from the College group's questionnaire completed by the course tutor shows that when asked overall, how would you rate your group's experience? they rated them as very good. Were the range of activities suitable and relevant to your groups needs again the very good option was selected. Do you find the level of instruction and leadership appropriate? Once again, the very good option was selected. The tutor was asked why did you book a visit with us? And wrote on the questionnaire, "It was part of the groups college course to support their local environment and community. Alongside this they have to complete work experience/volunteering hours to achieve their college certificate". When asked would you bring this group again, or another group in the future? The tutor chose the yes option.

Due to the beneficial feedback from the tutor on the questionnaire regarding the positive benefits of the visit to the students and in particular how it has benefited the groups wellbeing and "it enabled the group to be away from a classroom environment which they often struggle with. It also helped build their confidence completing tasks that they wouldn't have had the opportunity to try in a classroom setting". Furthermore, the college informed the Forest Centre by email that the college groups attendance at the Forest Centre had been invaluable in broadening the learners outlook and understanding of how they can take an active role in supporting their local environment and community. Therefore, the evidence strongly indicates that if resources allow it would be mutually beneficial for the college and the Forest Centre to continue this arrangement in the future, in line with the National Lottery Grants for Heritage mandatory project outcome a. A wider range of people will be involved in heritage which stipulates that the aim is to reach a range of community young and old and from diverse backgrounds.

Recommendations

The success of the Tortworth Forest Centre open days and volunteering opportunities is very clear to see through all the positive and conclusive data and evidence collected from participants in the Evaluation process. It undoubtedly shows that all the hard work and dedication of the staff and volunteers at the Forest Centre has contributed to making it a place where people enjoy visiting and volunteering. The data also suggests that the Forest Centre are meeting the appropriate outcomes in section 3f of the National Lottery Grants for Heritage, (How will you evaluate your project? Section four: Project outcomes). However, because of the nature of the Evaluation process it has positively hi-lighted areas that require further input from the Forest Centre team in order to help develop the Forest Centre for the future and to further expand upon the National Lottery Grants for Heritage project outcomes. These areas I will outline in this recommendations section, taking care to be sensitive to the very nature of the project which as indicated by numerous volunteer and visitor's comments is even more attractive due to its un commercialised and natural ethos.

The data suggests volunteering was indicated as the least selected event visitors would like to participate in in the future and I am aware that the Forest Centre website and Facebook are used by the Team to advertise volunteering events comprehensively. However, to help increase the number of visitors wanting to volunteer and contribute to the Forest Centre in the future, I would suggest the Forest Centre Team Look at ways to advertise the volunteer's days further for instance at the open day events. I would recommend having a number of posters around the site i.e., at the entrance/exit and in the round house advertising the many positive benefits volunteering can have on both the volunteers mental and physical health and the contribution they would be making to help benefit the Forest Centre. For example, use some of the great quotes collected within this Evaluation document from volunteers to design a powerful and motivational poster which will grab visitor's attention and inspire them to want to volunteer. This poster can also be downloaded onto the various websites the Forest centre advertise on.

Despite the majority of visitors to the open days suggesting the maps were helpful one visitor did however comment "make maps easier to follow with more info", therefore it may be beneficial to try and simplify the maps to make them more inclusive for all visitors regardless of their educational or disability needs. This could be achievable by adding simple pictures and symbols to the maps to represent the different areas and trees and play equipment.

A number of visitors also made comments for some improvements to the open days, for instance improved sign posting and more mini activities for the children as the swing was perceived as good for example. I would therefore recommend a mini activities course made out of the wood and logs from the Forest: a sea saw, climbing frame, balancing beams, stepping logs, tree house/play house etc, perhaps in one area of the Forest or dotted around the site to make them more interesting and fun for children to find and they could be included in the map's and handouts. Also increase the signposting around the site and use the same symbols and pictures on them, as discussed for the maps and handouts.

The data also suggests that better promotion of the learning resources and links on the Forest Centre website would be beneficial as a high proportion of volunteers implied, they hadn't accessed them. Although as previously discussed we are not sure if this is because they simply did not want to.

However, I would suggest that the Forest Centre team can easily address this matter by openly talking to the volunteers during the volunteering sessions about the learning resources and links available to them on the Forest Centre website.

I would suggest in the future an additional question asking how many males and females are in the group visiting the Forest Centre is added to the visitor's equalities monitoring form in order to gather more comprehensive data regarding the number of male and female visitors who are attending the open day events.

It was also hi-lighted by the data that both visitors and volunteers from the age bracket 18-24 were under represented at the open days and volunteering sessions. In the discussion I talked about the need to do further research on this matter to discover other social media platforms which are widely used by younger people in this category to advertise the Forest Centre open days and volunteering opportunities. Interestingly whilst carrying out brief research on this matter I found in the (The London School of Economic and Political Science 2017) that "the largest Snapchat age demographic [...] is 18 -24yrs. This age group makes up 37% of Snapchat users". Therefore, I would suggest that Snapchat would be a good social media platform for the Forest Team to explore the possibilities of advertising open days and volunteering opportunities on in the future in order to try and attract the younger age group.

I would furthermore suggest that the Forest Centre team need to explore ways to make the Forest Centre more accessible to both visitors and volunteers to the open days and volunteering opportunities who are from broader and more diverse demographic backgrounds. For instance, from all sexual orientations, religions and beliefs and ethnic backgrounds. Because the data suggests these groups of people are underrepresented at the Forest Centre. This could be partly achieved by continuing to improve and increase upon the already good connections I am aware the Forest Centre has with diverse communities and groups, whilst looking at ways to forge new connections with other communities and groups in the future.

I would also recommend the Forest Centre team look at ways to make the site more accessible for visitors and volunteers who have a disability. As hi-lighted in the data and deliberated in the discussion there are a number of visitors and volunteers who attend the open days and volunteering opportunities who do have a disability with the greatest number indicated as having a mental health disability, however the percentage is still low compared to the number of visitors and volunteers who do not have a disability who attend. Therefore, I would suggest in-order to make the open days and volunteering opportunities more inclusive and accessible for the disabled and less able bodied, the Forest Centre team firstly need to look at ways to improve the disabled access/exit to the site.

I stated at the start of this recommendation section that with any suggestions I make I will endeavour to be sensitive to the un commercialised and natural ethos of the Forest Centre. It would be easy for me to say that a disabled access path be put around the entire Forest Centre to enable all disabled visitors and volunteers to access, however I am aware that this would not be sensitive to the very nature of the Forest Centre project and would cause damage to the very environment the Forest Team are trying to protect and maintain. Therefore, my suggestion is to only look at the entrance/exit to the Forest Centre as I am aware that there is a slope at the entrance/exit to the Forest Centre site which would make it difficult for visitors or volunteers who are wheel chair users or have reduced mobility to access the site. This could be improved by reducing the gradient of the slope and making it wide enough for wheelchair users to access, also installing a solid hand rail and a suitable path which leads to the roundhouse area and toilets, especially for when the site becomes muddy. I further recommend

that in-order to increase the disabled visitors or volunteers experience and to adhere to the (UK Equality Act 2010) a disabled access composting toilet would also need to be installed.

This new inclusive design would allow disabled visitors and volunteers with reduced mobility to access the main area of the Forest Centre and the round house in particular which is the social hub of the Forest Centre. This inclusive design would enable disabled visitors or volunteers the opportunity to feel part of the Forest Centre community and enjoy the experience and many therapeutic benefits being emersed in a Forest can give to a person's mental and physical health. I further suggest that if the Forest Centre felt it was practical and plausible for volunteers with reduced mobility to be given the opportunity to volunteer at the site, then the work they carried out would need to be tailored to their needs and a suitability trained employee/volunteer would be required to risk access and supervise the individual or group carrying out the activity. This same approach can also be used with volunteers with learning disabilities or mental health disabilities who require additional support. There may also be the opportunity to rent out the new disabled access area to other groups, to help increase revenue to the Forest Centre. I am however aware that this project would be dependent on cost and may require additional funding for the changes to be carried out.

Furthermore, due to the success of the recent College group of children with learning difficulties volunteering visits I would suggest the Forest Centre continue with this arrangement and look for opportunities to allow other groups of children with learning difficulties from this college or other colleges to volunteer. Furthermore, this arrangement may be enhanced further by the recommended improvements to the access/entrance to the site discussed above and the new inclusive design recommended as if there are children within the college who were excluded from the volunteering opportunities due to reduced mobility, they would also be given an equal opportunity to attend the Tortworth Forest Centre.

Finally, the data that has been used to write this Evaluation report is from a sample of visitors and volunteers who have attended the open days or volunteering work days at the Forest Centre during the year 2020 and consented to participate within this report, therefore it is representative of their views and not conclusive of everyone who volunteers or visits at the centre. The Evaluation was also limited by the current Covid 19 Pandemic as the amount of data which has been collected was reduced due to the closure of a number of planned events, therefore, it would be very beneficial to re-evaluate the Forest Centre in the future. Indeed, I am aware that the Director of Tortworth Forest Centre Bec Cork has commissioned an additional Evaluation report to be written in 2021 and it will be very interesting to see how much impact the current Pandemic has had on the results of this year's Evaluation compared to the data which will be collected in the 2021 Evaluation. It will also be beneficial to see if any of the recommendation from this Evaluation if implemented have been beneficial or not to the Forest Centre.

References

The London School of Economic and Political Science 2017, Digital Communication, Social Media Platforms and Demographics, viewed 30 Dec 2020

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