

## Outdoors and Health Network

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## VC2 Roundtable Discussion 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2009

Speakers: Dr Liz O'Brien, Scott Ferguson, Professor Catharine Ward Thompson and Professor Pete Higgins.

Participants: Professor Stephen Tinsley, Dr Sarah-Anne Muñoz, Professor Martin Price, Professor David Uzzell and Dr Pete Varley.

Nine OHN members took part in the second video conference with presentations from Liz O'Brien, Scott Ferguson, Catharine Ward Thompson and Pete Higgins. They discussed their work, research interests and how these relate to the Outdoors and Health Network. The aim was to encourage the OHN members to discuss their similar interests across different disciplines.

The first presentation 'Health and the Outdoors' was from Liz O'Brien. She began by giving a background on the Forestry Commission (FC) and Forest Research. She discussed FC development within the past 15-20 years and the extent of the support it is now able to offer other forest agencies, such as benefits, grants, partnerships, education, events and campaigns. The Social and Economic Research Group of Forest Research focuses on many of the social aspects of forest use such as relationships, beliefs, why people behave in a certain way, parental concerns and influence, and change in behaviour. Some of these projects include evaluating how active children are in the outdoors, discovering some of the barriers that are preventing the public from doing more outdoor activities and investigating whether tailoring an outdoor space to a particular social group will prevent other social groups from using the space.

Scott Ferguson from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) made the second presentation. He began by explaining SNH's background and their current aims as an organisation. SNH focuses on conservation and the protection of natural heritage and has a corporate priority to simultaneously increase health and well being. Actions that SNH are looking at include increasing participation in urban environments and creating an infrastructure to increase outdoor participation. SNH work with a range of organisations, including assisting local authorities to promote active health and working with Greenspace Scotland and NHS Scotland to look at the health impact assessment of greenspace. They aim to monitor from a baseline position with a list of datasets and holders to indicate how health and well being will be improved in the future. Projects will be carried out to help this improvement and will include the use of the best evidence of the relationship between outdoors and health, putting existing knowledge into action, duplicating what has been successful elsewhere and developing work with other organisations.

Catharine Ward Thompson, from Edinburgh College of Art, began her presentation by introducing her discipline of Landscape Architecture and then her work within OPENspace. Her work seeks to explore whether greenspace makes a difference to health and wellbeing, what makes people use greenspace in different amounts and ways, for personal, social, environmental reasons and how the contribution of greenspace can be ensured in the future. Her organisation uses a variety of research and analysis techniques within their projects in order to explore these issues.



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Pete Higgins, from Edinburgh University, gave the final presentation of the Video Conference. His interests include sustainable development and the environment, with the belief that engaging with the outdoors is essential. He described his background and research in outdoor education and the value of the outdoors for children. His aim is to introduce and promote health and well being education into schools as this is central to the community and children's lives. A number of PhD students, interested in this field, are currently researching greenspace impacts and the value of outdoor interaction as a child. The Scottish Government and Scottish Natural Heritage are helping to use teaching and learning at a young age, to improve health, well being and outdoor interaction.

After each presentation, there was time for discussion between participants. As in the previous VC, this allowed the OHN members to start highlighting potentially interesting avenues of research that could be explored through inter-disciplinary work:

- There is a need to consider whether research and policy is concerned with 'healthy' or 'unhealthy' people's use of the outdoors. The policymakers involved in the OHN are interested in both and there is an increasing interest in the less active and the barriers preventing outdoor access.
- OHN members from different disciplines use different languages and labels for outdoor spaces, such as greenspace, open space and urban space. Do these areas have different values for researchers, policy makers and users? Are researchers talking about the same spaces but influenced by the buzz words of their disciplines that are necessary for funding schemes?
- The value of early primary education is essential in teaching children about the need for good health and well being and could be an important avenue of research.

The Video Conference ended with thanks from Sarah-Anne Muñoz and a reminder of the next OHN VC on 02.06.09.