



Stepping Stones

A model for community supported Green Health pathways

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Introduction

The concept of Stepping stones originated from work undertaken through the Think Health Think Nature (2018-2022), seeking to develop green prescription pathways from health & social care services into community nature-based activities.

It was recognised that, in some rural areas, there lacked availability or capacity within health and social care services to support individuals into nature-based therapies.

It was also recognised that there were opportunities to enter nature-based therapies without the input of a health and social care services and that people were benefiting from such activities without the knowledge of their healthcare service.

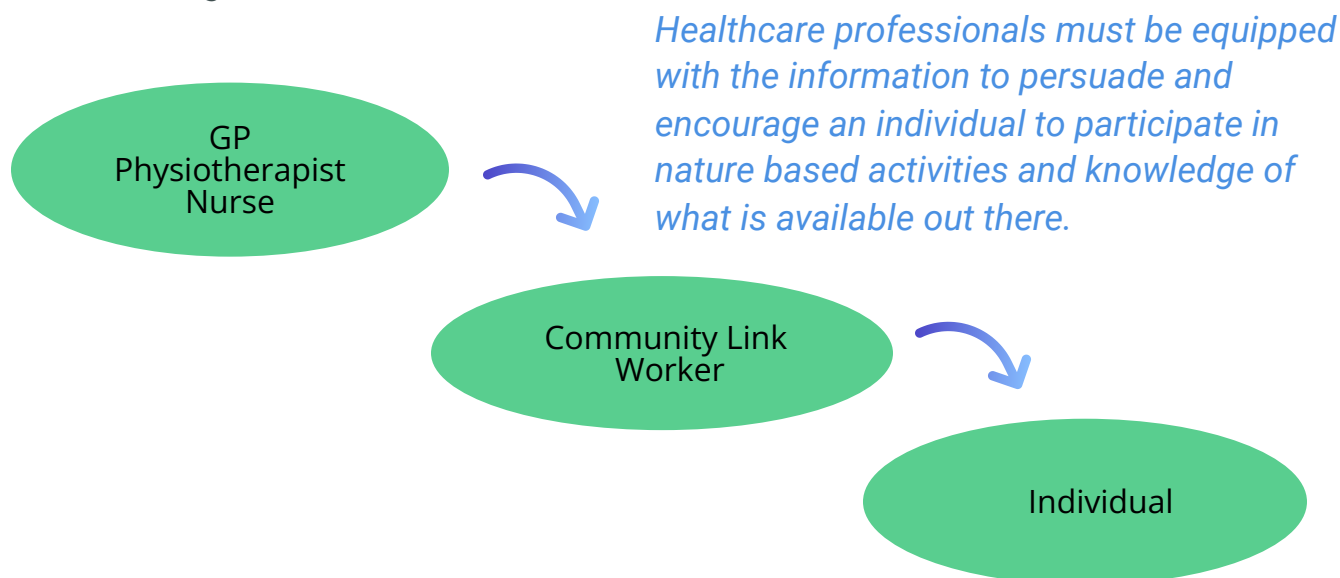
The Model

The model is a community led approach to positive physical and mental wellbeing, determined by suitable local activities (stepping stones) that sit within a shared pool of knowledge.



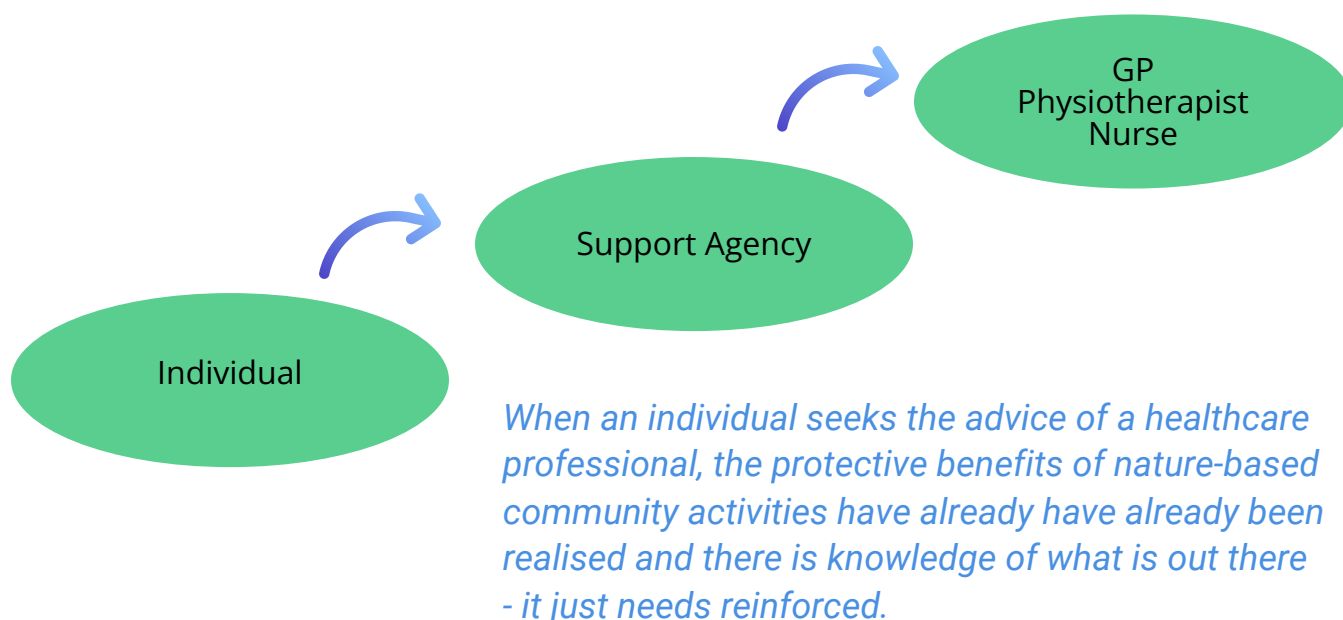
A typical health-led prescription pathway

In a typical nature-based prescribing pathway a GP or other health professional refers a patient to a Community Link Worker who can assess a patient and assist them into community based activities for their health & wellbeing. The model starts from a place of illness or crisis and is actioned, only after a professional help has been sought.



Community supported nature-based pathway

A Community supported pathway has a trickle up effect and is implemented ahead of professional help being sought. Community Enablers encourage participation. Stepping Stone activity providers are equipped with the right information to signpost individuals to onward steps. Individuals are signposted to professional support should a crisis or illness occur. The model can stand alone or it can run alongside a health-led pathway.



What is our pond?

The pond can be thought of as a pool of knowledge within a defined geographical area. Ideally, there would be an understanding of the challenges and barriers to participation and the health needs of their participants. It is sometimes helpful think of the barriers across four themes:

Behavioural barriers involve the individuals cultures, beliefs, perceptions and personalities. They are not static, and may change at different stages within an individuals lifetime. They are often influenced by external factors.

Physical barriers involve the location, topography and infrastructure within a service or a greenspace. Physical barriers will usually differ dependent on the user group. Even universal barriers, such as the weather, will adversely impact upon certain groups, more than others.

Administrative barriers are concerned with the processes that need to be put in place to safeguard an individual being referred to a green health activity. They require staff time to develop, implement and monitor. There can also be language or reading barriers.

Financial Barriers are concerned with the costs of delivering a successful green health programme; or the cost of transport, childcare or equipment to enable the participant to take part.

Who are our community enablers?

The Community Enablers are those available in a locality to offer a helping hand to individuals. Taking the first step into a new activity is often the hard and requires support. There are individuals and groups within a community that can act as 'Enablers', assisting individuals on to their first stone. Identifying these groups or individuals and raising awareness among them on what is available locally and the benefits, will help to find new participants. ***Who are your Community Enablers?***

Through the networking, knowledge, training and resources provided to the activity providers, people can progress on to new activities and move between the Stepping Stones. Information and communication across the networks is key.



Who are our community stepping stones?

The stepping stones consist of all the community activities that would help an individual maintain good physical, mental and social wellbeing. Each stepping stone should have an awareness of the other activities around them and how to signpost individuals. The idea being that once an individual takes their first step into the network, onwards steps should be easier as providers are each equipped with the knowledge and information to support that individual.

Who are your communities stepping stones?

- What is the activity?
- When is it?
- Who is it for?

Nature-based activities encourage people to increase their overall health and wellbeing, through interaction with the natural environment around them. Activities can include:

- Walking
- Cycling
- Gardening & Growing
- Outdoor Learning
- Outdoor Volunteering
- Creative Arts
- Relaxation & Mindfulness
- Outdoor Sports

Nature based activities can take place anywhere nature can be engaged with, including inside the home, garden, local park or wild spaces.

Some indoor activities can help people to build confidence and improve fitness to enable them to transition to nature-based activities.

Support

Inevitably illness or injury will eventually arise. When they do, it is important that the stepping stone activity providers are equipped to signpost individuals to professional support. ***Who in your community works to support people and for what issues?***

Example Scenario

- A participant comes to the leisure centre through a 'Bring a Friend' scheme. They have not been active for some time but sign up to the membership and after an 8 week programme in the Gym, start to discuss with their leisure attendant that they would like to meet more people. It transpires that the participant suffers from anxiety and this is why they have not been out in a while.
- The leisure attendant, due to their awareness and knowledge, recommend the local Health Walk Group as a suitable place to start and actively encourages the participant to give it a try.
- At the Health Walk Group the participant meets new friends and is invited to the community garden Open Day .
- At the open day, the participant signs up to become a volunteer with the local community garden and attends once a week in addition to their weekly health walk.
- Unfortunately, illness and family commitments means that the participant is unable to continue volunteering with the community garden and it is noticed that their presence on the Health Walk is less frequent.
- Due to the awareness and knowledge of the Health Walk Coordinator, they are able to raise their concerns with the participant and discuss what support they may need. They signpost the participant to support.
- The participants steps out of the pond for a period of recovery. While discussing their health needs with their GP they mention the activities they have been involved. The GP encourages the participant to re-engage with the activities when they feel able.
- The participant now has a few routes back - through the leisure centre, the health walk group and the community garden. Due to the awareness and knowledge of the staff and volunteers the participant is supported back into activity when they feel able.