

# Green Prescriptions Pilot Caithness



The aim of this project was to develop a green health referral pathway through which patients could be 'prescribed' contact with nature for improved physical and mental wellbeing. The Caithness Green Activity Network was established in 2021 to discuss how best to implement a nature-based prescription programme in the area. It was made up of local voluntary groups, activity providers and representatives from the High Life Highland, NHS and other public agencies. The below summarises the steps that were taken and the outcomes.

## 1 Map the Services

In 2019, Think Health Think Nature commissioned Caithness Voluntary Group to identify the opportunities for green health activities in the area through an online survey. Services include walking, cycling, gardening, outdoor learning, sports and volunteering opportunities as well as relaxation and mindfulness activities.

*The Trinkie, Outdoor Swimming Pool, Wick*



## 2 Build a Directory

In 2020, the activities were added to a Highland -wide Green Health Directory on the Think Health Think Nature [website](#). Links to the directory were also added to [Here for Caithness](#) a digital guide to resources and services which improve the mental health of our community.

# 3 Create a Network

We invited local stakeholders to form a short-life steering group to discuss how to take Green Prescriptions forward in Caithness. Members of the group included:

- Caithness Voluntary Group
- Thurso Community Development Trust
- Cycling UK
- High Life Highland
- NatureScot
- NHS Highland Public Health Team
- Active Health Project
- Dunnet Forest Trust
- NHS Highland Community Mental Health Teams

# 4 Promote



*Green Health Information Packs distributed across Caithness Communities*

The group identified a need to highlight the green health opportunities to the public in order to encourage the uptake of green prescriptions. Information points were created in Wick and Thurso Libraries during Green Health Week in May 2022. Green Health resources were distributed at community events and sent directly to GP practices and Community Link Workers.

# 5 Understand

Through discussions with the steering group, barriers to participation were explored, and access to affordable clothes and equipment was highlighted as was access to transport and knowing where and how to take part.

High Life Highland have been working with Community Groups in Caithness on a 'Kit for All' programme where unused sporting and outdoor wear can be donated for recycling among members of the community.

## Prescribe Culture Project

Developed by Edinburgh University and delivered in partnership with HLH museums and Countryside ranger service this 6 week programme is suitable to those needing support with the impacts of loneliness and isolation, anxiety, burnout and depressive symptoms. Individuals, living across Caithness can be referred in by health, social care and relevant third sector professionals. Click [here](#)





Dunnet Community Forest Caithness

## 6 Support



Between 2019 and 2023, funding support was provided through Think Health Think Nature to enable the following groups to run nature based health and wellbeing activities:

- Thurso Community Development Trust
- North Coast Connections
- Portskerra Activ
- Dunnet Community Forest
- Thurso Community Cafe
- Caithness Voluntary group
- Para Adventures
- Rumster Outdoor Centre
- Helmsdale Dementia Friendly Communities

## Skills and Training

Training needs were identified through a training needs assessment sent to participants of the local network events. Mental Health was identified as an area of training need. Nature 4 Health have delivered a blended course - Using Nature Nature as a Resource to Support Mental Wellbeing. This was an online course followed by a full day held at Dunnett Community Forest.

## 8 Develop

Thurso Beach

The RSPB Nature prescription was first launched in Shetland in 2018. It is a low-cost health intervention that has no negative side effects and is able to support a range of physical and mental health conditions, in a way that is entirely complementary to traditional medicinal treatments

NHS Highland were approached about increasing the reach of this initiative and due to the large geographical spread of Highland it was agreed to first launch in the locality of Caithness. The finalised prescription will be launched in April 2023.



# 9 Connect

Watch the Caithness Green  
Health Seminar here..



An online [Caithness Green Health Seminar](#) took place on the 13th May 2022. 90 people signed up for the seminar. It included presentations from Maree Todd, Scottish Minister for Public Health and Womens Health. There followed two network events where green health activity providers could meet one another and learn about tackling health inequalities. Around 30 people attended across venues in Wick and Thurso.

Attempts were then made to host an event during Climate Week 2022, whereby health and social care staff could meet activity providers and learn more about the opportunities of green health in the area. Unfortunately, due to time and capacity issues the event did not get off the ground but you can view a similar event that took place in Badenoch & Strathspey [here](#).

The [Active Health Project](#) supports people to become more active through 1:1 work via online calls. They have been working to help patients in Caithness through GP referrals.

## 10 The Referral Pathway

In Caithness we have engaged with our Community link Workers. Community Link Workers (CLW's) are valuable in making green health referrals a success. They offer non clinical support to patients, enabling them to set goals and overcome barriers, in order that they can take greater control of their health and well-being. A GP or other health practitioner can refer a patient to a CLW. Using 'good conversations' the CLW will support individuals to identify problems and issues they are experiencing and to talk about what really matters to them. In Highland there are CLW in some GP practices and some third sector organisations offer a similar service both face to face and online.

## Next Steps

Upon the launch of the RSPB Nature Prescription the Green Health Development Officer will work closely with Primary care workers in Caithness to promote the use of the resources and referral pathways. Work will get underway to embed green health activity across the community planning structures within the area to ensure continuation of action in to the future.

This pilot project was made possible with £5000 of funding from [Think Health Think Nature](#). It was led by the Senior Development Officer for Green Health at NHS Highland, as part of the work programme of the Highland Green Health Partnership. The partnership contributes towards "Our Natural Health Service", a programme being led by NatureScot which aims to encourage more use of the outdoors to tackle physical inactivity, mental health issues and health inequalities.

