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Barnardo's B-Wild
Practitioner Training Programme

Final Evaluation Report

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Introduction

Barnardo's is a UK-wide charity that seeks to achieve better outcomes for children.

In this report, we provide a summary account of a research-informed evaluation of the training aspects of the B-Wild programme which forms part of a wider array of services in this area for the charity.

Our focus here is to evaluate when and how the facilitators of the B-Wild programme benefited from this training and how it impacted on their practice. There is inevitably the opportunity here too to see how the programme was experienced in practice via the accounts of the B-Wild staff. However, we are not evaluating the effectiveness of B-Wild for its recipients. We did not gather evidence from young people, or families. Similarly, we did not observe B-Wild provision in situ.

The report outlines our aims and methodology. We provide a short findings summary at the outset. Thereafter, in 'Analysis Level 1' we provide four key themes that emerged from our analysis providing more in-depth evidence. In Analysis Level 2, we provide more of an overarching view of the key features of the B-Wild programme. We provide a short conclusion with reflections based on the findings and some selected literature.

The Barnardo's *B-Wild* Project



Funded by the Heritage National Lottery, B-Wild aims to improve the wellbeing of children, young people and families through time in nature. Participating services and staff are supported by a dedicated Project Coordinator with over a decade of experience developing, delivering and managing therapeutic practice in nature. Staff receive in-depth training on translating their trauma-informed, relationship-based practice into an outdoor setting as well as on-going support.

The key aims of the B-Wild service are to increase wellbeing in children, young people and their families. A key strategy designed to address this goal is via strengthening their engagement with nature:

- for the participants to have an increased understanding of natural heritage and how to access, engage with and protect it;
- for participants to gain confidence in accessing natural spaces and different ways to engage with it; and
- to increase the skill base of staff in nature-based therapy-based programming.

Coming out of the Covid19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of spending time outside for individual, and collective, health and wellbeing. The B-Wild programme harnesses the affordances of a wide variety of local green and naturalised settings to support children, young people and families to address personal, social and eco-social wellbeing.

Methodology

The approach taken in this research-informed evaluation was to work with B-Wild staff and B-Wild programme leaders to design a day-long event for the recipients of the B-Wild facilitator training programme. In 2023, current and previous employees of the B-wild programme came together to discuss the training and related practices in two focus groups. These were substantial and in-depth conversations dedicated to addressing the key areas we explored:

- the memorable ways in which the B-Wild training supported their work,
- key features they recognised as important and valued,
- their perceptions of the impact on children and families,
- the sense of the impact on the facilitators as practitioners and professionals.

Respondents

In total, seventeen respondents were present across the two focus groups, eight in the morning (three men, five women) and nine in the afternoon (two men, seven women). There was a spread in terms of when people had completed their B-Wild training and the respondents came from a variety of settings where practice, provision and needs varied. Some practitioners had more experience than others, with some coming only recently to the programme. Each outdoor context in use by B-Wild also varied. These distinctions afforded a diverse array of possible valuations and impacts improving the validity of the inquiry.

Inquiry Process

Over two hours were dedicated for each of two in-depth focus groups-. Each focus group event was conducted in two parts with a break in between. A staff base at Barnardo's offices was used for this

evaluation. Lead Barnardo's staff were on location during these interviews, but they did not present and did not participate in the recorded focus groups. The researchers' questions commenced with the use of photographs taken by staff, and other materials from practice settings which functioned as prompts. An interview schedule shaped the rest of the conversations which involved all members of staff present. The durations of the focus groups meant that there was scope to hear from all respondents and for nuances and differences in practice to emerge and be followed up upon by the two field researchers. Focus groups were audio recorded providing a secure basis for analysis. In analysis the thematic analysis followed a coding process. Both researchers reviewed all of the recorded data and strong inter-researcher reliability was evident in the shared sense of overall significance and in coding.

Findings Summary

Across settings and across all respondents in the focus groups, the centrality of relationships in these programmes came to the fore. We found that the relational aspects of the provision came to the fore in many of the discussions. These relations centred on both human and human-environment relationships. It was evidenced in their responses that the relationships among participants, between



participants and practitioners, and between 'B-Wilders' and their local places improved over time via their shared practices. Importantly, improved relations were attended to and well explained by participants as an outcome of B-Wild practices and these outcomes arose from spending more time in the natural environment in programme delivery, and in its preparation. Relationship to self and to the child's place in their community was also evidenced through better engagement with school routines and the readiness for learning. Our main focus was to explore the role of the training and the impact this had on the work of the B-Wild Champions. The outcomes from

the B-Wild training are evidenced hereunder with a sustained focus on relations formed and shaped via these nature-based experiences. These outcomes accrued in many similar ways for both the practitioners and the participants/recipients of the services.

Natural encounters formed the basis of the nature-based therapy in B-Wild. These appeared to generate an opportunity for a shift in both ecological and social relations which were co-emergent and consistently evolving: relating in new ways to the natural world was occurring in tandem with

new ways of relating to others and relating anew to yourself. Similar to work reviewed by Cooley et al., (2017), these changes in relations were seen not to emerge after one session, but over time, as new eco-social connections changes start to emerge.

Similar personal and professional outcomes accrued to staff too as a result of their skill development over time in programme delivery, and engagement with the programme as participants through their training. There was evidence that the training and the arising practices of the respondents were based on a genuine empathy and understanding of what the world of the child may be like for someone going through the B-wild programme. It was clear that the passion and belief the staff had for this work was a key component to their engagement and interaction with young people and their families and that natural settings supported this. There is also evidence of outcomes for recipients of service which are reported by staff. By default, these support for the view that the training programmes for B-Wild provided a useful and effective platform for the delivery across settings.

The B-Wild programme emphasises the importance of working with a child from a holistic and eco-system-based approach. A child should not be seen, or engaged with in isolation from their family, social or natural environment. It was clear from discussions with B-Wild staff that they view the child in relation to every relationship they have and acknowledge the fluidity and changing nature of a child's development and age-appropriate needs. This deep relational work between self, other and nature is needed if practice is truly going to abide by eco-system-based approaches (Engstrom et al., 2024). Whether intentional or not to families, the B-Wild programme is not just about providing opportunities for outdoor or nature-based play. The facilitated activities provide opportunities for developing emotional literacy, peer-to-peer and family-based communication, conservation, tuning into instinct, and empowerment and ownership over things that have been created or maintained.

Core and critical aspects of the B-Wild programme were identified in the evaluation. These are also the features of many programmes of green care or eco-therapy for example, interactions with nature or taking action for wildlife. We found evidence that the training provided facilitators with the disposition to understand and enact programming that took seriously the view that personal, social wellbeing can and is connected reciprocally to the wellbeing of the ecosystems that support us. In summary, we found evidence that the B-Wild training programme provided facilitators with the skills and tools to enact provision that comfortably aligns with the features or ingredients of known contemporary eco-therapeutic practice.

Analysis Level 1: Four Themes

In the following sections, we provide an account by theme and sub theme of the analysis. Example quotations from the transcripts are provided to exemplify the derivation of the findings.

Theme 1: The Role of Nature

The B-Wild programme afforded opportunities for participants to gain a more in-depth understanding of ecological processes and their connectivity with their everyday lives and local places.

Programme inputs allowed for increased recognition of the interdependence of all living things and the circle of life, and knowledge gained on how important the smallest creatures are in addition to the large.

Respondents all vouched for the importance of embodied and sensorial activities and encounters outdoors leading to tangible experience of seeing the non-human environment as more than a static backdrop. Seeing and understanding that the environment as a living and changing context supporting all life was seen to lead to better understanding of the environment, increased concern to protect and respect it.

For example, this session we've had a load o' mushrooms and each week the children have autonomously looked for the mushrooms and watched them changed and develop in how they've all diminished now, and they're interested in watching them grow. So, they've shown curiosity of the natural world, I guess.



The B-Wild programme, and training for staff, ensures that there is an emphasis on learning to identify and understand some of the Scottish habitats, flora, crustaceans, invertebrates, birds, and mammals. Staff are not expected to be qualified ecologists, but participants stated how much they appreciate being able to name what they see and understand its place in the wider ecosystem. The development of practitioners' skill sets in this respect allowed them to link natural processes to human growth, change and development via nature connectedness

practices. Drawing on how particular plants change through the seasons and how animals are niched in their habitats afforded rich conversations with young people and families about their own desires

to change and challenges to adapt.

It was evidenced that respondents were acutely aware of the ways in which interpersonal response-making within families was connected to place-responsive interactions with their local and wider eco-social context. Practitioners made connections between increased ability to identify, respect and protect across social and ecological domains, for example, how we increase people's understanding of the true scale of the climate crisis, and readiness to respond through family practices.

I think there are so many opportunities with nature like, you know, bereavement. I think there's a reason why when, when we experience bereavement etcetera, we often go back to nature. And I think it's really important for children as well. The, you know, the circle of life so to speak. It gives children an opportunity to see something that is outside of themselves to some extent although they realise that they can impact upon it.

All facilitators of the B-Wild programme reflected on how important it was to introduce young people to nature in a hands-on, experiential, and safe manner. Some B-Wild contexts took further steps to address environmental concerns via forms of activism to help nature recover. Practice in one urban setting prompted the active involvement of local people in the re-naturalisation of the space for improved wildlife and biodiversity. Practitioners agreed that they based their practice on a two-pronged approach: B-Wild offered opportunity for families to help nature flourish whilst also encouraging families to thrive. Leading by example in instances of litter picking and other activities 'for' nature, also encouraged the young people to develop their own 'care-taker' or stewardship identity in relation to the natural environment. Many of the place-responsive, embodied approaches to learning and participation were seen as key to this approach.

Litter picking you've mentioned, which I think is really important, which we didn't think again any of our young people would want to do, but part of our practice and training was to influence that. One wee guy got so hooked on plastics in the sense of how long it takes to biodegrade. He's almost done a thesis on it, you know [laughs]. It's gave him a focal point, something to talk about at school

Theme 2: Inter-personal and Intra-Familial Relations in Natural Settings

The B-Wild programme afforded changes in inter-personal and intra-familial relations. Primarily, this shift was evidenced as being achieved through spending concentrated time with others and experiencing and supporting each other through the highs and lows of family life. In many ways, the natural environments provided an evocative context that supported these developments. It was reported that this can be developed through displays of vulnerability and connection through shared experiences and supporting each other with tasks, risk management and assessment, and the unintentional (or not) healing of individual and interpersonal trauma (Cooley et al., 2017). The very

real experience of having to problem solve together, share in mutual curiosity, play and resilience development, demonstrates the skills needed to communicate well, actively listen, and have



empathy, that classroom or 'sterile' environments cannot support as effectively. We also know there is an epidemic of loneliness (Tomaz et al., 2021; Goodfellow et al., 2023) and the B-Wild programme supports people combat feelings of loneliness by getting them outside with other people. New memories are formed and there is a chance to practice developing relational skills and gain confidence in trying new things or going to new places.

The B-Wild facilitators have also spoken of how they have seen family relationships change as a result of the programming in natural settings. The natural context afforded a rich context for relationship formation between participants *and* between the human participants and the natural places visited. A multitude of B-Wild practices supported this including building shelters, bug-hunting, nature-based scavenger hunts, and listening games for example. These local-scale interventions allowed for action and agency for supporting nature to become meaningful and accessible in a place-based manner. Starting with local actions emerged as a key B-Wild feature as expressed in practitioners' approaches. As one practitioner stated, it was important to offer the "opportunity where they can contribute towards the nature, towards the future outcomes for the whole world, how important would that make them feel about themselves?" Another said: "It gives them a sense of ownership, it's theirs". This local approach through taking action for the environment is seen as affording scope whereas the nature of some global concerns might be overwhelming: "I think the world climate thing's just beyond some of them".



Respondents noted that tasks based in nature in the B-Wild programme worked well to develop new ways of interacting between practitioners and children and between family members, whilst also developing emotional intelligence, and increasing the capacity for mindfulness.

I think it was the third, third day of the programme, the dad approached us and said he could'nae believe the difference in the relationship. He'd bonded wi' his daughter because they were doing a lot of canteen work like putting the hammocks, building dens, and it was something they'd done

together where they'd never had the chance... it changed that, or helped that relationship, having a bit of time spent off their phones, off their, without the kinda, the stresses of routines in the morning and things.

Across programme elements, evidence aligns with nature-based therapy research which shows mindset shifts occur in how we understand our role within a family and community system, as we develop self-esteem (Chavaly & Naachimuthu, 2020). The natural setting, the focus on relationships and opportunities for taking action appeared relevant in a linked manner for raising self-esteem. As one practitioner put it: they no longer say, 'I cannae dae that'.

Theme 3: Intra-personal Aspects

One aspect of the nature-based therapy process is that there were benefits to the B-Wild champions, facilitators and leaders. The facilitators themselves too reported becoming more confident and skilled in modelling relationship building and using aspects of nature as a therapeutic third 'co-teacher' to support this education on the nuances and needs of relationships. The capacity to problem-solve, sit with uncertainty and risk, support others through challenging times as well as be sure of one's own resilience, can all be nurtured and developed by working with others in an outdoor setting. Often leaders related their own wellbeing and beliefs about the world to their knowledge of how interconnected we all are. Lumber et al. (2017) discuss how a feeling of connectedness can emerge through observation and engagement with nature, and the facilitators observed this shift occurring in young people and families. The B-Wild facilitators discussed how the sense and trust of self, and how they show up for others they are in relationship with have been highly influenced by these experiences. They were perhaps evidencing aspects of the biophilia hypothesis, which states that we have an innate biological need and attraction to natural environments and spending time in these environments are key to our survival (Wilson, 1984).

So, this is in my garden now 'cause it meant that much when I was doin' my training so it did.

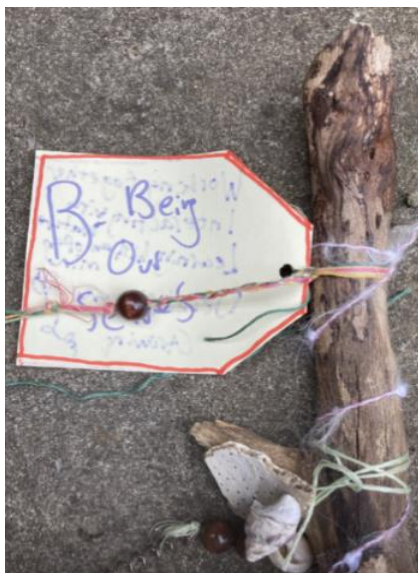
Facilitators discussed how the training also inspired them to return to a somewhat childlike state and see the world from a place of wonder. This aspect wherein facilitators themselves were active participants while learning how to deliver the programme allowed a greater sense of empathy to develop towards the young people and families. Respondents evidenced the process of being more mindful, tuning into their own emotions, and developing the ability to reflect on the new knowledge

and awareness they had about the natural world. Relatedly, they spoke of how B-Wild connected to their own relational landscape mirroring the internal work they will be looking at developing in young people and families.

That's why you become so engaged in it as an adult sorta thing isn't it because you go back to your child-, go back to your childhood state don't you because you're playing in the woods. You know, you're talking about fairy dust [respondent laughs], it's brilliant, you know.



Therapists and psychologists, neuroscientists, and social workers are increasingly aware of the benefits of spending time outdoors on mental health, anxiety, blood pressure and overall wellbeing (Lumber et al., 2017; Engstrom, 2019). Facilitators who are attuned to this process tend to already have an affiliation with nature and be willing to be flexible in our approaches to maximise impact. Understandably, there is considerable work to be done to support other leaders and practitioners to gain confidence in this way of working, which is part of the ethos of the B-Wild programme. Not only does the programme aim to see the change in young people and their families, but practitioners have also stated they are inspired to change their practice as the training and experience has influenced their lives in other areas, to be more holistic and ecologically sensitive.



B-Wild, like other Barnardo's programmes, takes a trauma-informed lens for practitioners to identify and work with participants through the layers of injustice and harm they have experienced (Becker-Blease, 2017). Bringing participants out into the 'wild' and allowing them choice, freedom, acceptance, and opportunities to be brave and recognise their own growth and development, in a programme that also emphasises safety and appropriate risk taking, are all central tenets of the B-Wild trauma-informed practice.

Theme 4: Place-Responsiveness in the B-Wild Programme

In our analysis, we have ample evidence that practitioners took seriously the need for the B-Wild families to address challenges and experiences in natural outdoor settings. In the literature, these tasks can be termed 'nature-connection practices' or 'place encounters' (Brindal, 2023). Evidence

from other programmes supports the view that place-responsive embodied experiences generate and enable new relations with places and with the entities found there: human and more-than-human (Mannion and Lynch 2016). We too found evidence that these new relations were generated via B-Wild practices.

Practitioners were acutely aware that addressing place-relations were key to simultaneously addressing intra-familial relationship building and intra-personal development through increased attentiveness, self-esteem and so on. Hence, we can argue that the B-Wild programme takes a place-responsive approach wherein there is an ongoing emergent reciprocity between humans and places. At one level, place-responsiveness was actioned through taking time to adapt activities to the human and more-than-human or natural setting:

It's the same game but you just adapt with the age range or adapt it to parents or adapt it to whatever your area is.

Of interest in B-Wild is the way in which respect and understanding for other species seems connected to the B-Wild outcomes for participants. As Taylor (2017) puts it, the flourishing of one species is connected to the thriving of others. Practitioners were harnessing the agencies of both humans and more-than-humans (weather, terrain, plants, animals, landscapes) to help shape how the programme developed. Another aspect of this work was a focus on the affective dimensions for the development of humans themselves and for humans' ethical relations with their local places.

[...] helping children and young people understand feelings and emotions, how that intertwines with the natural world, giving them time and space to, you know, to do a bit of meditation outside and out in the nature.

Somewhat counter-intuitively, the role of places and nature as co-shaper (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013) of practice is enabled by focussing *not only* (if not 'less' at times) on the sole needs of the human as a recipient of therapeutic service. Instead, taking a place-responsive and relational approach seemed to be core to affording a space of possibilities for new improved relations to form wherein therapeutic, ethical, and affective impacts are felt as mutually supportive.

[...] family day, [the parents] were just like, 'I did'nae realise we had this just sitting on our doorstep and how much fun it's been for us all, no just the kids. I've really enjoyed it. It's made, lifted my mood, it's made me feel better. My mental health and wellbeing, I can see how that will help it now.' Because [the parents] have been getting.....counselling and stuff, and the parent's have] been saying to them, 'Get oot mare, dae mare things,' and they're like, but when [the parents] actually did dae it, they could see that it was making a difference in their selves.

The outdoor spaces acted to perhaps signify that classroom rules and expectations were suspended. This seemed to be a key aspect for children who had experienced trauma and needed space and time to make choices about what to do, how to play, express and be themselves.

A lot of children struggle being confined to a classroom and the daily tasks of a classroom that is involved in that, so getting outdoors, it's another opportunity to see if something suits them better, interacting with the natural space outside.

Place change and action for supporting nature formed a central aspect of many B-Wild initiatives locally. These efforts provided contexts for place connectedness and attachments to place to emerge. They also afforded outcomes related to pride, self-esteem and engagement in teamwork towards shared goals.

They were so engaged in it and really took ownership and responsibility of cleaning up this space



Analysis Level 2: Key Features of B-Wild

Thus far, we have identified some key themes focused on the relational aspects of the programme as experienced by facilitators in receipt of the training. As our analysis proceeded, we sought to provide a more overarching view of the key features of the B-Wild programme arising from the experiences of facilitators.

Firstly, it quickly became apparent that there were some easily identifiable 'Core' features which formed the basis of respondents' narratives from focus group sessions. These were:

Core Features

1. Time Outdoors
2. Games and Activities
3. Addressing the Needs of Individual Children

However, across the respondent interviews we explored the distinctive features and *nuances* of these 'core' features and how they comprised B-Wild in their practice. Respondents were keen to

explain the distinctions between how B-Wild might *appear* and what was significant about it *in practice*. For example, as touched on earlier, it might appear that this is *simply* a child-focussed, play-based outdoor provision. Yet, in discussions, we heard a lot about how B-Wild was distinctive in being ‘not just’ about play time outdoors.

It’s the whole experience as opposed to the activities themselves if that makes sense.

Hence, the ‘core’ features need to be explained alongside what emerged as the *critical* aspects of these features. We explain these critical aspects below.



B-Wild is Not Just Time Outdoors in Nature

In B-Wild, time spent in greenspaces certainly means spending time in nature. But this time was critical spent actively noticing nature, engaging with natural processes, and acting for nature (see Moriggi et al., 2020). Participants were encouraged to spend time in nature to learn to appreciate and care for other species and habitats in an on-going way with repeat visits to sites often involving conservation action. It is important here to notice the difference between the obvious *use* of wide open-air spaces for tasks and a more nuanced valuing of the role of nature in B-Wild provision.

Nature was more than a backdrop to *provision*:

Researcher: And we’re not just using nature? [...]

Respondent: We’re sharing nature.

In descriptions of the role of nature, practitioners spoke of the symbiotic nature of this relationship, based on the idea of mutual benefits, and social support (Jennings et al., 2016), arising from respect and understanding for both humans and the natural world. In some cases, there was evidence of children taking their ethic of care into their own homes supporting wildlife through instigating new greener approaches to gardening there.

For practitioners, the programme stretched beyond spending time in nature and sought to engage participants through a range of tasks and exercises ranging from arts-based (for example poetry writing) to conservation tasks (for example, litter picking, pond restoration and other action).

Similarly, for B-Wild facilitators, time spent outdoors was critically connected for many to what was

happening indoors for the younger participants. Attention was paid to the improvements in how participants had been in class and with their family members after B-Wild provision experiences as the following three extracts show:

Children who are out with us in the morning tend to be a lot more settled and more engaged in class in the afternoon.

We used to take a group of six out and four of them were from one class and the teacher would, we used to take them out in the morning and she would always say, like, the afternoons were always so much better when they'd been out in the morning and then they'd come back and then they'd managed to tell everyone at lunchtime what they'd done.

They're coming in and they're all bouncing and they're, they're talking about what they've done the night before at the Be Wild group and stuff like that. I've had that where they've, normally they would've come in, probably been late tae come in, cause they'd be sluggish to get up and whatever, but the adrenaline's still building, it's still there, so they are... They're willing tae come in and tell every, tell their friends and teachers what they've been, what they've been doing.

Participants were aware of multiple benefits of time spent in nature for families. These included becoming aware of local resources and places that were 'on their doorstep' but they had never visited. They reported benefits in terms of raised physical activity level too leading to improved sleep patterns and improved mood, and reduced anxiety.

For respondents, the B-Wild approach to experiences in nature was characterised as one of a reflective safe time and space where there were fewer restrictions compared to indoor classroom time. The B-Wild space functioned as an interim space that sat between the worlds of home, school and other contexts. The practitioners' awareness of these spatial and relational aspects was central to the approach taken on a given day and to how impacts and benefits played out.

Another aspect of time in nature included encounters with other species. These included species that were noticed whilst outdoors. At other times, the number of species mentioned in the interviews and many respondent accounts showed that this was highly valued and significant experience for both the facilitators and the children and families with whom they worked. Whilst there was a concern about not knowing always the species names, facilitators were keen to find out more, and some seemed to be gaining considerable expertise around the ecology and habitats of the species found in natural outdoor



places. Critically, the actions taken for these habitats to support wildlife formed a distinctive part of provision for many.

B-Wild is Not Just Games and Activities

In B-Wild, the games and activities were core features.

However, these activities centred on catalysing engagement through playful, action-oriented, challenging and reflective tasks. These tasks were carefully chosen with setting and participants needs in mind. They were to be carefully sequenced with the aims of inter and intrapersonal development, and learning. These challenging but fun tasks were used to target participants needs for better relationships, wellbeing, emotional literacy, self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-esteem. These developmental gains were made possible through the contextual factors (having time in nature with fewer restrictions) which afforded better communication opportunities.



B-Wild for me, it's about allowing communication. It's just like freedom and communication for children. [...] a lot of them are just so restricted by the classrooms

Practitioners were keen to explain the way outdoor time in nature through B-Wild activities allowed for a formative focus on the affective domain.

B-Wild evokes emotions and I think I totally agree with that. I don't think it's, although the activities etcetera are fantastic, I think it, it's what's underlying it is in the outdoor experience, the opportunity to come together to reflect

The outdoor activities and tasks in nature were characterised as affording a sense of 'freedom' for practitioners. Relaxed fun time in nature focused on a wide range of activities provided time and space for participants to more readily express themselves.

B-Wild was the best one to support the youngsters to hear what they, what their emotions were rather than sitting talking to them. [...] you could actually see their emotions coming out, you know.

A key feature for respondents noted was a concern for interpersonal and intrapersonal growth and change. The impacts felt on an everyday basis were significant – for example, 'being more relaxed and ready to learn'. At other times, there was evidence of quite transformative change for some child participants. The therapeutic aspect of the intention was critical for the B-Wild approach to have impact.

Like there's one boy, one boy in particular, the one that never leaves the house, his engagement has been absolutely fantastic. He is actually waiting in his garden on us picking him up. He's not one of the boys that we struggle to get out the door.

We found when we took him down to the beach that day, it was during October, it was a lovely sunny day, he just, he just, this change in his demeanour as well, he just calmed down, he was so chilled, he didn't have any swearing, he didn't want to eat anything... he was just so happy just drawing things in the sand, picking up shells, and obviously picking up, like, bits of glass and sea glass and things, and trying to get him interested in that, and he was just so happy with it... we just feel he's not got anywhere for people to listen to him really. So, you know, he gets one-to-one all the time with us and he's just so happy and calm, you know

The outdoors became more important as a context during Covid. Here as the narrative explores, we can see the opportunity for children's own agency to coalesce around the forces of nature, wherein his kite flying seemed to express himself with a form of resilience in the face of the pandemic.

Covid is, I think made us become more outside, you know, [...] we adapted sticks that you use for the garden and we got some plastic and we got some pens and we got some string and we says, 'It's blowing a gale outside, it's pouring of rain, why don't we make a kite?' [...] it was amazin [...] one wee boy, he drew, like, Covid. He drew Covid on his kite. And we went outside in the pouring rain, blowing a gale, and we tried to fly these kites.

As we have seen in the evidence, it was important for practitioners that the activities in B-Wild allowed for time and reflective space for younger participants in a place-responsive manner. Our



analysis suggests that the out-of-school context and the nature-based activities provided a focus beyond the child, reaffirming the child as agent and countering the prevalent narratives of 'child as problem' replacing them with the notion of the thriving child with contextualised agency. B-Wild has at its core a range of tasks and activities that were to be drawn upon in practice. However, tasks alone are insufficient for B-Wild outcomes. Time and space for practitioner, parent and child to reflect and express ideas and emotions was afforded through the careful sequencing, pacing and contextualisation of these activities in natural settings by these trained facilitators.

B-Wild is Not Just about the Individual Child

In B-Wild, practitioners were taking an ecological and relational approach to an individual child's and their context (in class, in the family, after school). This approach sets the stage for the choice of provisions for children and often meant including opportunities for intergenerational and family-based approaches to provision. This relational orientation also meant paying attention to the way

indoor participating experiences in indoor spaces linked and impacted outdoor experiences and vice versa. Practitioners were keen to note how B-Wild interacts with other childhood spaces of family life and schooling: “...all the skills we’ve got are transferring not just from B-Wild but into classrooms and into families”.

For B-Wild practitioners, context was critical to delivery and impact. Through understanding the immediate, local and wider contexts of the child’s growth and development, facilitators sought to harness the features and natural processes found in outdoor spaces for addressing personal and family change. This was achieved through attending to the *child + their family + learning context* in the round. Many of the practitioners reported the importance of engaging with the child alongside their parents. They valued doing outdoor activities together in B-Wild which led to shared experiences, and feelings of achievement which had the impact of improving parent-child relations, engendering shared feelings of ‘satisfaction’, ‘fun’ and pride, and confidence in having done something ‘meaningful’ and ‘productive’ which contrasted at times with other negative stories of their child’s in-school participation.

We did have people come in and say, ‘Oh, we went there at the weekend,’ and then when we were there on a Tuesday she would say, ‘This is where my dad brought me to this tree and I put a seat there, it’s gone now,’ or, ‘I built a den,’ or whatever. So we did have some children saying that they’d been back and they’d obviously been sharing with parents what they’d done, you know, during the week sort of thing, so we did get some evidence of that.

Core and Critical Features of B-Wild

Through this analysis, we have surfaced the nature of some of the core and critical features of B-Wild. Importantly, how these core features related to each other and were offered in practice was critical to the B-Wild offer. We can summarise the **Core** and **Critical** Key Features of B-Wild below.

Core and Critical Features of the B-Wild Approach		
	Core	<u>Critical</u>
1.	<i>Time in Nature Outdoors</i>	Tasks involve critically noticing nature, engaging with natural processes, encountering other species, and taking action for nature.
2.	<i>Games and Activities</i>	Activities involve taking a critically reflective approach: tasks are playful, action-oriented, and reflective in scope. They are carefully chosen and sequenced with the aims of inter- and intra-personal development, and learning.

3.	<i>Children's Needs Are Focus</i>	The B-Wild programme critically involves taking an ecological and intergenerational and relational approach to an individual child and their context. This means understanding the context for the participating child in class, in the family, and after school. Reciprocally, the wellbeing of individuals is connected to the wellbeing of the ecological and social context.
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Challenges

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the main challenges the participants reflected on were centred on local organisational support or 'buy-in' and time constraints. Both key factors impacted on a small minority of participants' ability to feel confident in their ability to be as prepared or supported as they would like to be with the B-wild programme. There was a perception that with increased organisational commitment, there would also be an increase of trained staff that would allow peer-to-peer skill development support, team-based comradery, as well as opportunities for peer learning and informal support. Participants noted a need for greater recognition for the time needed for planning, preparation, clean-up, and debriefing within the context of their overall workload.

Some productive tensions emerged across the conversations about the provisions. These ranged from finding the balance between focusing on natural environments and focusing on the wellbeing of participants. Similarly, there were times when decisions were being made about when and how to target families and when the provision would be for the young people themselves. Relatedly, some provisions linked more with schools or sought to, whilst others were less deeply connected to schooling. For many enhancing provision and increasing engagement was an ongoing concern.

Conclusion

Broadly, in this evaluation of the B-Wild programme, it is clear to see the integration of elements of 'green care' throughout the development, integration, and delivery of the programme. Green care is an approach that integrates caring for people and the land simultaneously (Garcia-Llorente et al., 2018; Moriggi et al., 2020). It is often used with groups that are socially excluded or disadvantaged in a way that expands on eco-therapeutic practices or horticultural-based practices. 'Green Care' can involve care farming, animal assisted therapy, therapeutic horticulture, but also experiences in greenspaces.

Additionally, we can confidently describe B-Wild provision as ecotherapy (see Burls, 2007, Burns, 2009), even though the facilitators are not ‘therapists’ the practices they engage in are therapeutic. The term encapsulates many of the core and critical aspects found in practice (as evidenced by practitioner reports). These included *contact with nature*, the finding of *solace* in natural settings, and the experience of being in receipt of *benefits* from this time outdoors inclusive of *physical and mental wellbeing, enhanced mood and reduced stress levels*.



There is a growing body of evidence that exposure to nature can aid the generation of these kinds of benefits. B-Wild similarly is likely to generate these kinds of benefits for the trainees too and we found some evidence of that too. The evidence from the literature agrees that the combination of type of tasks found in B-Wild in outdoor natural greenspaces will likely encourage higher physical activity levels, increased social contact and opportunities for personal development. These tasks tended to be *sensory*, and involved *interactions with nature*, and *encounters with other species*, which are the known key features of beneficial eco-therapeutic practice. Again, we found ample evidence in the stories from practitioners that this was prevalent for this programme. Hence, we can say the B-Wild training programme set in train a set of practices that aligned with the known core and critical aspects of contemporary eco-therapeutic practice as a form of ‘green care’. Importantly, we note that this involved the development of the wellbeing of the human *alongside* the ecosystem which were *reciprocally enhanced* through the close and collective building of contact between B-Wild participants and local nature. As the respondents themselves summarised:

I think it stems from being in nature, it *then* stems across everything else.

It’s as somebody else says, you can’t just separate one from the other.

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