



Environmental Leadership Programme

Impact Report Summer 2025



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"Our campaign had a real ripple effect when it came to boosting nature connection and creating moments of care for the environment—especially in communities that don't usually get these kinds of opportunities. Through the Nature Connection Campaign (NCC), we used fun and accessible tools like our Bio-Bingo sheets to encourage people to get outdoors, notice the little details in nature, and feel part of it, even if just for a few minutes.

We found that once people noticed nature—like spotting a bumblebee or listening for birdsong—they began caring more about it. This shift in mindset helped reduce harmful behaviours (like littering or trampling wildflower patches) because people became more aware of their surroundings and how their actions affect them.

Some people even went a step further, telling us they'd started picking up rubbish on walks or planting wildflowers in their gardens after getting involved. Others said they felt less stressed and more motivated to get outside regularly. These might seem like small actions, but they're powerful signs of growing nature connection.

In short, by sparking joy and curiosity about the natural world, we helped communities reduce negative impacts, reconnect with the outdoors, and begin their own journeys of restoring and respecting the wild spaces around them."

This programme would not have been possible without funding from The National Lottery's Climate Action Fund and the support we received from individuals and organisations providing their time as guest speakers, facilitators and coaches.

Foreword

The culmination of Year 2 of the Environmental Leadership Programme (ELP2) marks the midpoint of our project, as well as the end of a significant period of development and transition, for both the project and the team.

During this programme year the ELP2 team moved from UpRising Leadership into our new home within The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the team for their flexibility and resilience during this turbulent period, and their commitment to the continued delivery of a high quality of programme experience to our participants.

As well as settling the project and team into our new environment, there are other notable achievements to reflect on and celebrate this year, including;

- Participants positive response to our amplified approach to embedding nature connection throughout the programme year. This was achieved through dedicated staffing being attached to this programme element and improved activity structure to make this come to life for all participants, regardless of accessibility needs.
- The introduction of a refined badge system with gamification elements, providing clearer progression pathways which led to increased participant engagement throughout the programme year.
- The application of an enhanced support framework serving diverse participant needs, allowing ELP2 participants the space and ability to engage with the programme according to their own needs and to have direct and clear lines of pastoral support from within the delivery team.
- Whilst the past year has offered challenging moments, the creation of this impact report has provided a welcome moment of reflection on the successful adaptations we have made both to programme outputs and challenges that the ENGO (Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation) sector are experiencing more broadly. Through our 'Share, Learn, Improve' strand of work and our delivery experience of working with underserved and underrepresented young people, we have made strides in sharing our knowledge and the lived experience of the young people we work with. We have explored mission critical subjects such as; understanding barriers to engagement within the green movement for young people from diverse backgrounds, what it means to be a truly accessible programme and organisation and how we can support young people to understand the breadth of jobs within the green sector, supporting more young people to learn how to best equip themselves for those roles.

Looking ahead to the next two years of the project, and anticipating the legacy that it will leave - we remain focused on our core mission: supporting young people to develop as environmental leaders while fostering meaningful connections with nature, in order to build a movement of diverse environmental changemakers. We're excited for the opportunities that being part of The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts will offer us in influencing the work of colleagues within the movement and amplifying the voices of the young people that have trusted us with their reflections and lived experiences. It is they who are our next generation of changemakers after all.



Rukaiya Jeraj

Head of Youth Programmes,
The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts
August 2025

Overview

Targets

The following targets were set for Year 2:

- Reach 200 young people through taster sessions and recruitment activities
- Engage 115 young people in the first week of activities
- Graduate 80-100 young people
- Achieve an 80% graduation rate among those who engaged in the first week's sessions
- Achieve the creation of 15-20 NCCs (Nature Connection Campaigns)
- Impact, engage, and benefit 150-200 community members
- Graduate a cohort with 75% of participants having increased knowledge, skills, networks, and confidence about how change happens and their role in driving it
- Graduate a cohort with 75% of participants demonstrating an increased connection to nature
- Graduate a cohort with 75% of participants showing a positive change in their behaviour towards the environment.

We will be reporting our achievements against these targets throughout the report.

Learning from Year 1

The recommendations from last year's impact report have been accommodated in the following ways:

Recruitment

- We began recruitment earlier, allowing more time for outreach and follow-ups.
- Current participants were actively engaged for suggestions on which groups and communities to approach.
- We carried out a number of community-based taster sessions and attended in-person community events at the Birmingham Settlement's Nature and Wellbeing Centre, Craftspace (who aim to engage a similar young diverse group to us), Dawley Town Council's intergenerational walks, Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust (BBCWT)'s 'Climate Cafe', and Midlands Arts Centre's Big Green Weekender.

Curriculum and delivery

- Significant development was made in curriculum design with the introduction of a badge system, communicating the different elements of the programme, and incentivising engagement across and within different modules. Badges were awarded for completion of these modules, clearly outlining participants' learning and guiding them through the programme journey. This is explored in detail in our Year 2 mid-programme report.



- While progress has been made in reflecting diversity and lived experience among speakers, this remains an area for further development.
- With the programme now based within The Wildlife Trusts, we have access to a wider range of potential speakers. We also ensure our participants understand challenges in the sector relating to a lack of diversity and pathways inwards and upwards for a wider groups of young people.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact (MEI)

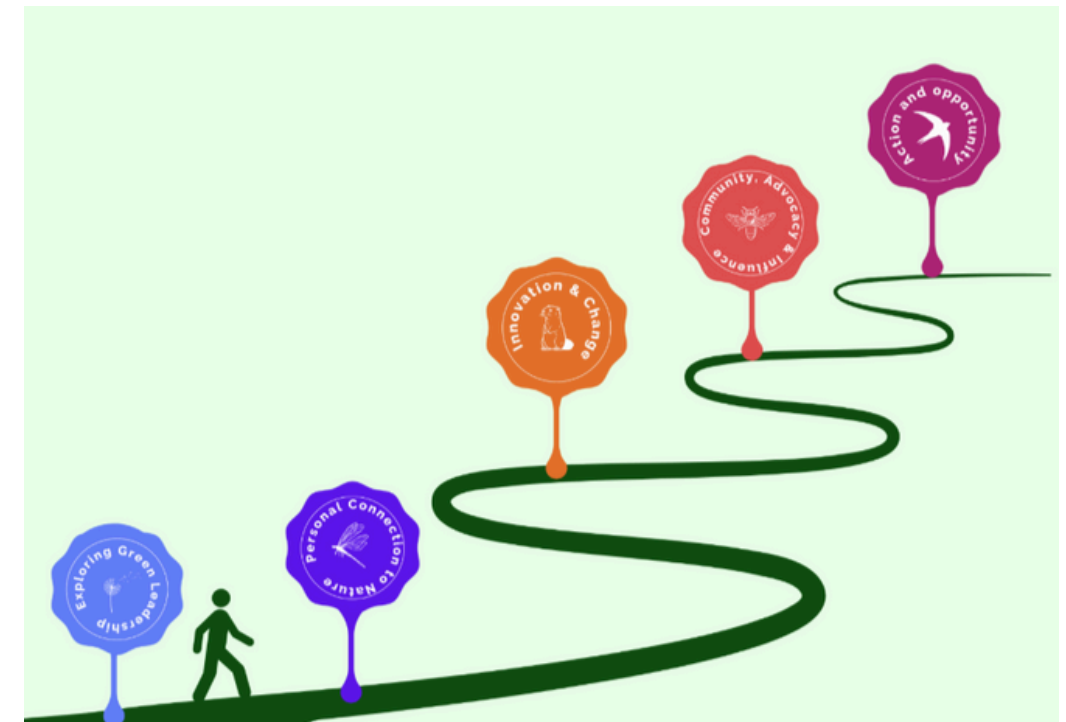
- The MEI framework was revised for Year 2, predominantly developing comprehensive MEI objectives across the five-year project and the four programmes it spans, to ensure we are collecting meaningful data through which we can tell the story of the project and its participants.
- Further development is planned for Year 3, consolidating the MEI objectives and ensuring we are capturing evidence to support both project legacy and current programming.
- Surveys were moved from FormAssembly to FormStack when the UpRising team transferred across to the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts.
- Pre- and post-coaching surveys for both participants and coaches were developed, with changes to questions across all four surveys to collect more meaningful responses, demonstrating the value of coaching to the participant journey.
- We have streamlined data collection points. This has involved merging the post-programme survey and individual NCC feedback into one form to make the process more straightforward for participants, increasing the likelihood of us getting more responses.
- Moving into Year 3, we are merging mid-programme 1-2-1 meetings and streamlining termly reflections into one mid-programme reflection and one final reflection.
- Communication with participants about the importance of data collection has been improved, including sharing final videos with the cohort and encouraging them to support outreach.

Team development and feedback

- Work was started on consolidating the programme style, with meetings around facilitation and delivery held to support the programme team to be more consistent and clear.
- The delivery team was encouraged to take ownership of programme content and continuously improve session delivery,

"For Year 2 of the project we made several changes to the delivery and general participant experience on the programme. These changes were based on a combination of participant feedback, me joining as a new staff member, and existing staff feedback. One of my favourites of these changes relates to the nature connection side of things! This year we added in monthly nature connection activities to allow the participants the chance to get out and connect with nature even when they aren't physically with us. These activities ranged from exploring their local greenspace, to watching a nature documentary, to taking part in RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch. As well as this, we also introduced an element into our online sessions called 'Species Spotlight'. This section was a chance to learn about a new species of plant, animal or fungi that can be found in the West Midlands, and allowed the theme of nature to still be present in each online session. Outside of nature connection, we also introduced things like the end of term 'check-ins' with our pastoral groups to make sure everyone was feeling good about the previous term, and also to allow us to let them know about what was coming up in the next term."

- Benjamin, Programme Delivery Team



The Cohort

The delivery team practised an open application recruitment process to engage and onboard young people onto the programme.

To the right are details of the numbers of individuals engaging at stages of the open recruitment process.

We had aimed for 100-130 applications for Year 2.

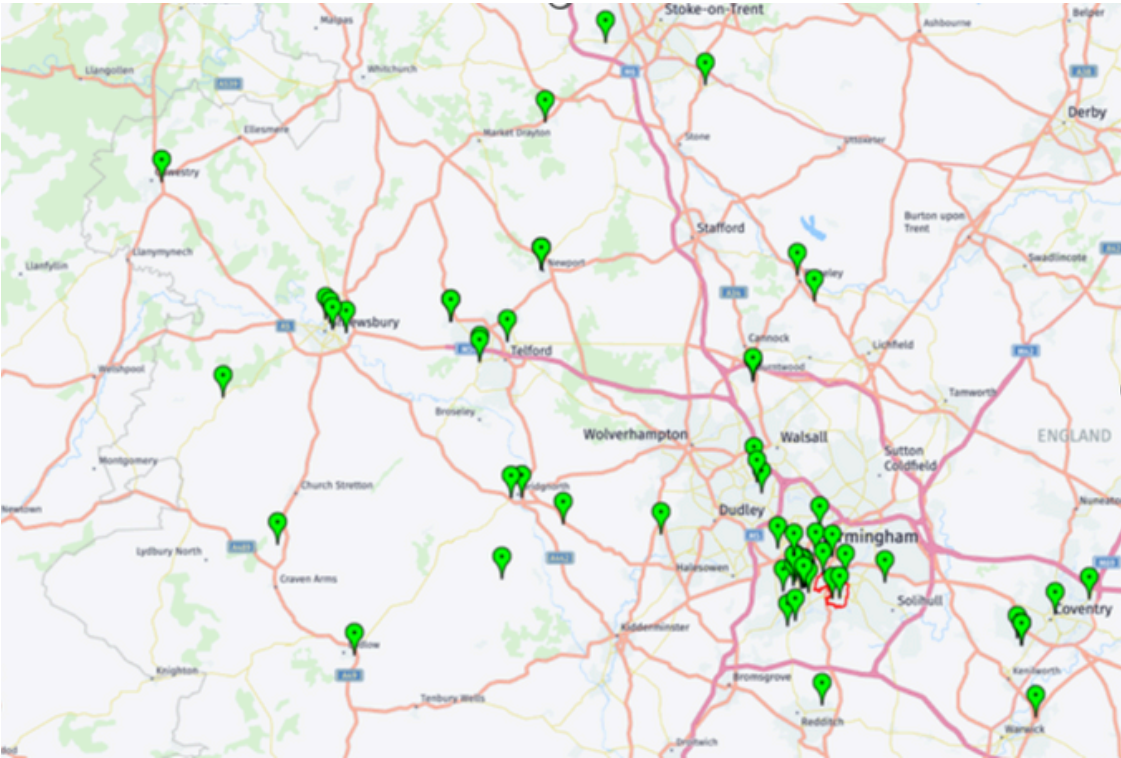
In total, we received 92 applications, 81 accepted their offer of a place on the programme, 6 were offered a place but did not accept, 1 needed a safeguarding call before we could offer them a place but did not respond to our request and 4 applications were rejected or withdrawn.

Applications	92
Accepted	81
Started	69
Completed	36

The following statistics were of the 81 participants that enrolled onto the programme in October 2024:

- 54 female, 22 male, 9 identified as non-binary or preferred not to say
- 73 were in some type of work or education
- 5 had caring responsibilities
- 66 attended a UK state-funded school and 31 received free school meals

The map below shows where participants were based:



Highlights

1. Strong individual development among participants who completed both pre- and post- programme surveys (17 participants). This showed those who were able to engage fully with the programme gained significant benefits across all areas of the theory of change (skills, confidence, knowledge, networks, nature connection), directly supporting the programme's goal to build stronger personal connections to nature, and demonstrating participants' deepened understanding of how nature connection drives their environmental behaviours.
2. Nature connection activities were successful for engaged participants in supporting

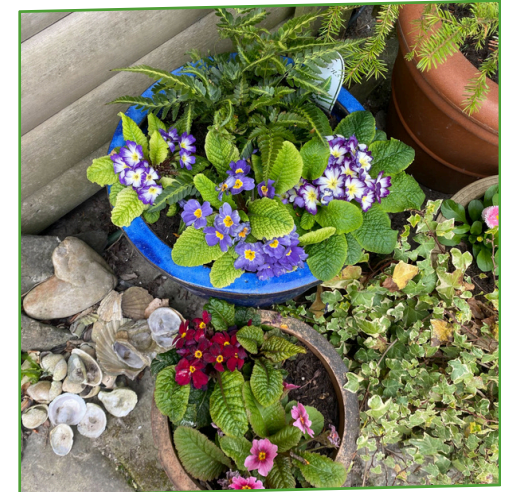
them to build stronger personal connections to nature while providing the foundation for participants to co-create and deliver campaigns in their own communities.

3. The programme received high participant satisfaction with overall experience rated an average of 9.56 out of 10, indicating the value participants regard the programme as having.
4. Development of a strong participant community. Participants consistently highlighted meeting like-minded peers as transformative, supporting ongoing collaboration in delivering community-based NCCs beyond the programme.

Challenges

1. Recruiting a truly diverse cohort of young people, including those not at universities and those not currently engaged with the environmental movement. We want to reach these wider groups and bring them onto the programme to offer different experiences and perspectives. We anticipate this will enrich cohort discussions and learning, widen the cohorts' collective frame of reference when exploring leadership and nature challenges, and prevent echo chambers occurring. This wider diversity would enhance participant experience and impact, expanding the knowledge base through environmental justice insights and practical skills, and enable participants to become authentic ambassadors in their communities, supporting the programme to build a genuinely representative movement.
2. Retention of participants for the whole programme. The challenges we experienced across various elements of the programme including attendance at sessions, engagement with campaigning, completion of surveys and communications through our digital platforms had an impact on the programme experience for the cohort. Through spring and into summer sessions were often much quieter, and it became harder to engage those who did attend in discussions.
3. In some cases campaign groups struggled to work together effectively due to retention rates and the geographical locations of individuals within the same NCC.
4. Gaining responses to surveys and other data collection points was challenging, especially toward the end of the programme for the post-programme survey and

Nature Connection Index. This meant we were only able to explore the full impact of the programme on the most responsive participants completing the programme, not the whole graduating cohort.



Images include participants taking part in creative nature connection activities during Launch Day, and artwork and planting produced by participants as part of monthly nature connection activities.

Programme delivery

The learning journey

Participant's learning took place over 25 digital and in-person programme sessions (totalling 82 hours) broken down into the modules and events outlined in the participant journey to the right.

Engagement and community

Throughout the delivery of the programme the team embedded activities and opportunities to encourage the cohort to bond, share with and learn from each other. Where possible activities were designed to allow the cohort to develop their community whilst spending time in nature and/or also developing their connection with nature.

The programme took place both digitally and in-person, with a digital learning space and communications platform utilised throughout to engage participants, share information and resources, and encourage community building.

"One of our aims for Year 2 of the project was to create a feeling of community within the cohort, particularly looking to build on and improve this from the first year of the programme. We did a number of things to achieve this, right from the start of the first programme year. As in Year 1, each participant had a member of the delivery team as their pastoral support person or Team Leader. Before our first in-person gathering, each Team Leader ran an additional online drop-in chat for their pastoral group as a way to get to know each other. At Launch Day, we made a point of having a focus on connecting with nature and each other, talking about community agreements and discussing eco-anxiety. We also introduced a few fun, more relaxed social elements to our online sessions, such as a Christmas quiz in the last session of 2024. We made sure that every in-person day had time for connecting with nature and socialising. All of this has also made the experience more positive and enjoyable for the delivery team, and we have learned things and thought of ways to build on it even more for Year 3."

- Jen, Programme Delivery Team

October - December

Online sessions:

- Welcome to ELP2
- Nature Connection 101
- Leadership 101
- Local and Global Issues
- The History of Movement Building

In person sessions:

- Launch Day
- Strategic Challenges
- Campaign Day 1

January - March

Online sessions:

- Power, Privilege and Identity
- Equity and Justice in the Climate Movement
- Impact and Evidence
- Developing your Pitch
- Campaign Kick-Off
- Careers in the Green Economy

In person sessions:

- Campaign Day 2
- Campaign Pitching: Dragon's Den

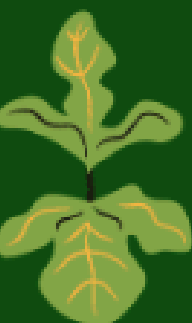
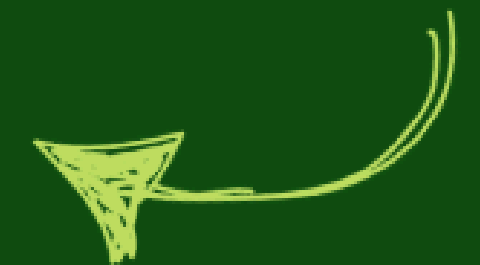
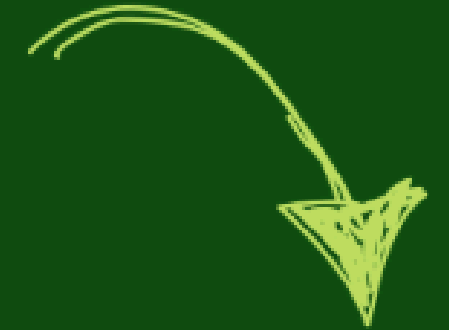
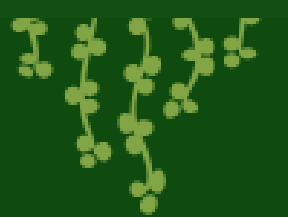
April - July

Online sessions:

- The Green Sector Landscape, Allyship and Advocacy
- Existing Power Structures
- Your Next Move

In person sessions:

- Power in Action: Visit to Parliament
- Graduation

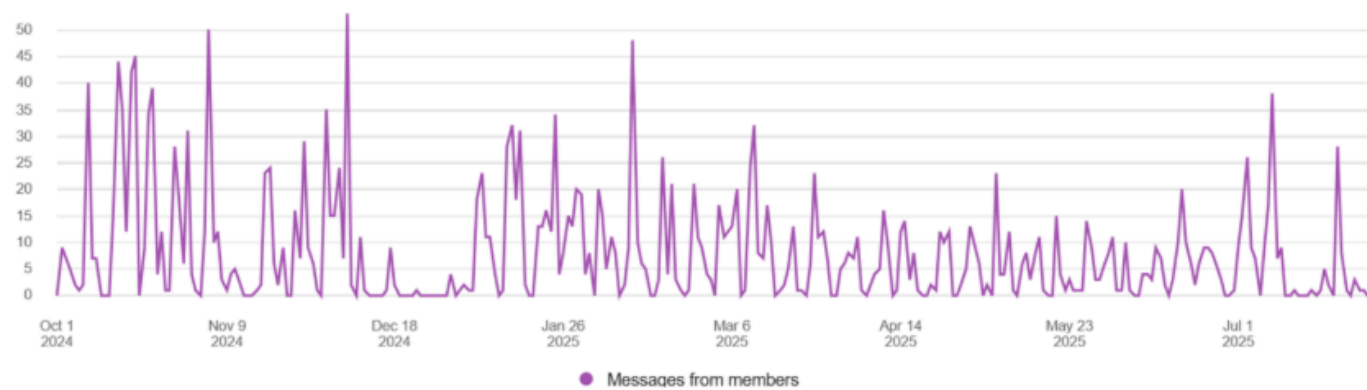


Communication platforms

Participants used a variety of communication platforms to facilitate conversations between members of the cohort and the programme team. These included **Zoom for online events and sessions** and **Slack for wrap-around communications**. The cohort also had access to a **learning hub hosted on the platform Mighty Networks**. This hub enabled the sharing of programme documents, resources and the timetable with participants, comparable with the likes of an intranet.

The ELP2 Slack workspace was established as the main communication hub for programme participants. By the programme's conclusion, 31 members remained actively engaged. Member activity peaked in October 2024, coinciding with the start of the programme and Launch Weekend. Following this, there was a gradual decline in active members from October to July 2025, corresponding with a general decrease in participant engagement over time. The statistics also show notable dips around December and March which align with holiday breaks for Christmas and Easter. Throughout the nine-month programme, a total of 2,424 messages were exchanged on the Slack workspace.

The below graph shows Slack engagement over the course of the programme.



Engagement rates

We ensure there are a variety of ways to engage with the programme so that participants with different learning styles and schedules are able to take part in the way that best suits them. Participant engagement declined significantly throughout the programme year, with the steepest drop occurring in Term 3 (May-June). This coincided with university exam periods and deadlines, suggesting full-time students faced particular challenges maintaining commitment. Reduced attendance impacted session dynamics, making discussions quieter and breakout room discussions less viable.

The engagement levels across various aspects of programme delivery were as follows:

- Reflection log responses peaked in Term 1 with 26 responses, dropping to 7 responses in Term 2, and finishing the programme year with 9 responses
- 31 participants engaged in mid-programme 1-2-1 meetings with their Team Leader, providing valuable insights into participant's experiences, and enabling targeted support.
- There was good engagement with nature connection activities throughout the programme with participants sharing activities via Slack's #chat-channel. While fewer participants engaged over time, a significant number continued sharing activities until the programme end.
- Online platforms usage:
 - Slack - 84 members showed consistent engagement among active users (nine of which were the programme team), though overall numbers decreased over time. Participants preferred alternative communication platforms (WhatsApp), making information dissemination challenging.
 - Mighty Networks - used primarily for sharing session content and materials. This showed more active members than those believed to be engaged at the programme end, but platform usage does not reflect true engagement levels since participants mainly accessed it for session recordings and additional content.

The academic calendar's influence on engagement patterns became evident through the correlation between reduced attendance and university assessment periods. Additionally, participants expressed preferences for informal connection opportunities beyond structured sessions and also used alternative communication platforms to connect with each other, like WhatsApp, rather than just the programme's designated Slack workspace.

Coaching

“Coaching is going really well - I can sense gradual progression in my mindset and I love to see the differences within myself.” - ELP2 participant, May 2025

A unique part of the programme is the opportunity participants have to receive professional coaching. This is included so young people feel they have meaningful individualised support whilst on their ELP2 journey.

To capture the impact of this part of the programme, we asked both coaches and programme participants to complete surveys at the start and end of the coaching experience. The below insights are drawn from the responses to those surveys.

11 participants took up the offer of coaching. They were a mix of university students (64%) and working professionals (36%) with academic and professional interests spanning environmental sciences, leadership, and business-related fields.

Before participating in coaching, participants shared the following:

- Goals related to:
 - Career entry (73%) - most participants aimed to secure their first professional role or shift careers
 - Skill development (45%) - with a focus on leadership, communication, and networking
 - Confidence building (55%) - a recurring theme across goals and aspirations
- Low confidence towards professional networking in particular
- They were facing challenges such as imposter syndrome, work-life balance, health issues, and geographic transitions.



After coaching, participants reported significant personal and professional growth, with recurring themes including:

- Personal growth and self-awareness - many discovered personal values, reframed negative thoughts, and developed inner resilience. Quotes like “Meeting my inner leader” and “Understanding the inner saboteur” reflect deep introspection.
- Career development - participants gained clarity on career paths, improved CVs, and successfully prepared for interviews. One participant secured a volunteer placement with coaching support.
- Confidence and communication - coaching boosted confidence in professional communication, especially around interviews and networking.
- Strategic planning and time management improved.
- Unexpected insights – one participant's personal branding improved and they shared they learned to “sell themselves” authentically and gained emotional resilience noting “It really made me think hard about who I was as a person and what skills I had and what I could offer in any role.”

Coaches shared interesting insights into participants' development potentially taken for granted by participants themselves:

- 67% of coaches reported noticing significant growth in their participant's confidence and resilience
- 83% observed notable improvements in communication skills
- Half of coaches saw tangible steps taken by participants to progress their careers
- Also highlighted were personal transformation, improved self-awareness, and increased emotional resilience.

Nature Connection

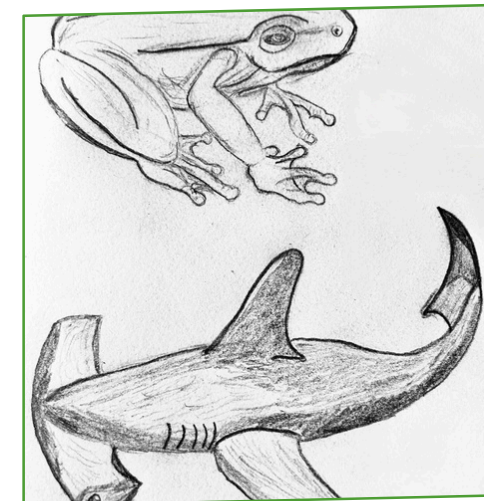
This year a calendar of nature connection activities was suggested with something for participants to do during each month of the programme. This was introduced as part of our programme development to further embed nature as a core element of the programme more clearly across the learning journey, allowing participants multiple touchpoints to explore their connection with nature in a variety of ways. We hoped to broaden their views on what accessing nature could mean across rural and urban environments, to support our mission of supporting more young people to find ways of engaging with nature that were meaningful and relevant to them.

Key insights:

- Started strong with 36 participants at Launch Day
- Maintained good engagement through autumn (33 in Oct, 20 in Nov)
- Began declining in winter/spring (15 in Dec, 12 in Jan)
- Reached lowest levels by late spring (5 in April, 3 in May). The team note that numbers reflect the wider challenge of programme engagement into spring which coincided with exam periods.

The programme began with strong attendance at the Launch Day activities, where participants engaged enthusiastically with hands-on outdoor experiences including owl pellet dissections, campfire lighting, den building, and nature murals. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with participants particularly enjoying the outdoor activities and expressing genuine fascination with elements like the owl pellet investigations.

Art and photos produced by participants as part of their monthly nature connection activities.



The autumn months sustained relatively strong engagement, with participants taking part in October's local greenspace exploration and engaging with November's nature-based art creation. The flexibility of the October activity, which allowed participants to explore their own chosen green spaces ranging from back gardens to national parks, appears to have contributed to its success.

In winter, participants watched nature documentaries in December and took part in the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch in January. The quality of engagement remained high, particularly for the birdwatch activity, which generated substantial interest in learning more about birds and resulted in numerous photographs and sightings being shared.

The programme experienced its most challenging period during late winter and spring, however those who engaged with February's night sky appreciation activity produced thoughtful and quality submissions including drawings, photographs, and night time wildlife observations. The Dragons Den event in February saw participants undertake in-person sensory nature connection activities including natural material printing, a 'meet a tree' exercise, and sensory walks. This structured group event received excellent feedback, with one participant reporting they had "never felt so at one with nature".

Spring saw March's 'signs of spring' activity, April's 'rainbow walk' and May's 'sit spot reflection' encouraging participants to use nature to consciously support their wellbeing and mental regulation.

Numbers aside, the depth and quality of engagement among those who did participate remained remarkably high throughout the calendar of activities, suggesting that the activities successfully fostered genuine nature connection among committed participants.

Nature Connection Index findings

The Nature Connection Index is used to measure change in how connected to nature people feel. This year we were only able to gain pre- and post-programme responses from 14 participants. However, despite the low response rate, significant positive outcomes were indicated across all measures of nature connection.

Key findings:

- The most profound impact occurred in participants' sense of **belonging within nature**. The statement "I feel part of nature" showed the largest transformation, with positive responses increasing from 64% to 93% (a 29% cohort improvement). Individual participants averaged a 16% improvement in this area, the highest across all measures.
- Participants showed meaningful development in prioritising nature engagement, with "Spending time in nature is very important to me" increasing from 93% to 100% positive responses (7% cohort improvement, 13% individual average improvement).
- The programme enhanced participants' capacity and appreciation for diverse nature experiences, with "I enjoy being outdoors, even in unpleasant weather" improving from 64% to 79% positive responses (15% cohort improvement, 12% individual improvement), indicating growing comfort and resilience in varied environmental conditions.
- Several core nature connection attitudes showed ceiling effects with participants maintaining 100% positive responses both pre- and post-programme in: Finding beauty in nature, Treating nature with respect, Nature bringing happiness, Finding nature amazing. However, even these measures showed continued individual growth (5-9% individual average improvements), suggesting the programme deepened appreciation even among those already strongly connected to nature.

The data demonstrates that 100% of participants who responded experienced measurable improvement, with every individual showing positive change when comparing their matched pre- and post-programme responses.

By mapping this impact alongside the more qualitative data from participants' reflection logs and interviews, we can see the significance of meaningful opportunities to consciously engage with nature.

The has facilitated a fundamental shift in participants' environmental identity - moving participants from viewing themselves as separate observers of nature to experiencing themselves as integral parts of the natural world. This shift of perspective points towards deeper environmental stewardship and more sustainable behaviours.



Delivery team member, Jen, supporting a participant with a nature connection activity during Launch Day.

Nature Connection Campaigns (NCCs)

The programme's campaigning component is designed to provide participants with real-world experience in developing and supporting environmental action, creating a safe space to experiment, encounter challenges, and learn from both successes and setbacks. This core part of the programme sees participants form groups to develop their own Nature Connection Campaigns (NCCs), with sessions around project management, community organising and communications supporting them to facilitate positive change in communities.

The ELP2 community organising approach to grassroots campaigning emphasises relationship-building, power mapping, and mobilising local voices to drive action from the ground up. We encourage participants to plan their campaigns for communities they are part of and support them to identify and engage with partner organisations who hold influence in those communities. Participants learn to identify community assets, engage stakeholders, and build collective power. This community-centred organising approach will be further embedded and expanded in next year's delivery. We will support participants to work together to develop campaigns more focussed on engaging other communities of young people aged 18-25, who experience barriers to engaging with the environmental movement.

This year the programme supported the launch of five Nature Connection Campaigns.

Campaign groups were set data collection objectives and given support to achieve them through programme sessions and a campaign toolkit. This data was used to measure the wider impact of NCCs on communities and nature connection. The objectives were:

Type of data to collect	Suggestions of how to collect it
Total number of people attending each activity	Sign in sheet / Tally sheet as people come into an activity / Headcount / Clicker
Total number of people interacting with your campaign online	Views Followers
Evidence of campaign activity with communities	At least 3 photos of campaign activity (see doc on photo/video consent) Encourage all attendees to use the QR code to fill in the survey. Reassure them this is anonymous. Allow time in your event for participants to complete this.
Evidence of the positive impacts of campaigns on the physical environment	At least 1 photo
Support the creation of resources to enable others to develop and deliver their own nature connection campaign	Keep your Campaign Journal up to date and make sure you include the delivery team in opportunities to capture this information

Campaign impact

Participants organised themselves into five NCCs, taking different approaches to building communities' nature connection to encourage pro-environmental behaviours:

Leaves not Litter focused on practical environmental action through organised litter picking events for the communities based around Selly Oak park, an area of Birmingham with a high student population. This campaign demonstrated the highest level of measurable environmental impact, with participants collecting between 6-15 bags of litter from local parks and engaging 63 followers through social media challenges.

Greenhousing took a nature restoration approach, implementing rewilding initiatives in university accommodation areas of Birmingham. Their work involved distributing wildflower seeds and planting pollinator-friendly species, directly contributing to local ecosystem regeneration.

Nibbles in Nature developed family-focused educational events in urban parks in Birmingham, creating accessible nature connection activities designed to encourage outdoor engagement among families with young children.

Bio Bingo used engaging ways to encourage the public visiting their local park in Birmingham to connect more with local species through identification activities and educational resources.

Birds of a Feather combined education with community storytelling, collecting folklore and nature connection stories from communities spanning different generations by engaging residents at a Birmingham care home, in conversations about environmental stewardship.

Outcomes from NCCs

- 21+ bags of litter collected
- 20+ individuals responding to the NCC community engagement survey, or engaging with campaigns at in-person events
- Multiple sites rewilded with wildflower seeds and pollinator-friendly plants
- A care home committed to installing bird feeders.

Community engagement

Campaigns demonstrated varying approaches to community engagement, including:

- Several campaigns specifically designed activities to be accessible regardless of age, physical ability, or environmental knowledge, and all campaign activities and resources were free
- Campaign events were held in easily accessible urban parks and high-footfall areas
- Campaigns engaged in multiple forms of environmental advocacy including educational activities, community organising efforts and supporting petitions, and also engaged people in creative activities including crafting, colouring and leaf rubbing, and creative writing
- Campaigns engaged communities through building social media presences, creating online events and physical posters and resources including a magazine.

This year we introduced an additional data point into the programme - collecting data directly from community members engaging with NCCs. The core objective being to better understand the impact of NCCs on community members that engaged with them.

The programme is particularly interested in how we might be able to measure how nature connection activity across diverse communities can positively impact environmental attitudes and behaviour change, to ultimately benefit the environment. The team created physical postcards asking people engaging with campaigns to make a pledge for nature with a QR code link to an online survey exploring their experience of interacting with the NCC.

Challenges around communicating this to the cohort and disseminating the survey to campaign attendees saw us collect only eight survey responses across four campaigns – something we are actively working on improving next year. However, despite the low numbers, the group of respondents were diverse, with the age range spanning under 25s to 61+, men and women, a variety of ethnicities were represented, as were people living in suburban, urban and rural environments. Furthermore, insights were positive:

- 75% reported feeling more connected to nature
- 87.5% reported feeling more confident outdoors
- 87.5% reported feeling more motivated to help nature
- 87.5% reported feeling more part of a community
- 87.5% committed to an immediate pro-nature behavioural change
- Respondents demonstrated commitment to take action through nature pledges including pledges to reduce waste and improve recycling, litter picking, engaging children with nature activities and installing bird feeders.

The campaign analysis demonstrates that participants successfully translated environmental knowledge and passion into community action, creating immediate environmental benefits and suggesting the potential for the programme to support sustained local environmental engagement.

Campaign case study: Birds of a Feather

- **Issues:** The UK has lost 600 million breeding birds since 1980 (one in six). And, older generations are being excluded from predominantly social media-based environmental conversations.
- **Approach:** The campaign used folklore, storytelling, and cultural heritage to reconnect older adults with biodiversity issues.
- **Audience:** Older adults in a care home in the West Midlands (some of whom have witnessed landscape changes over decades).
- **Method:** Workshop-based story collection creating a community zine (a small handmade booklet or 'mini-magazine') as an alternative to digital-only environmental messaging.
- **Video log:** [Birds of a Feather: Nature Connection Campaign Journey](#).

The Birds of a Feather campaign emerged from participants' realisation that older people are excluded from social media-based environmental conversations, risking loss of traditional ecological knowledge, experiences and stories.



Birds of a Feather's display table at the programme's graduation event.

The group used folklore and storytelling to reconnect residents at a care home with biodiversity while creating opportunities for people to share their personal environmental experiences. They brought the global issue to a hyper local level and ensured it was relevant and accessible for people engaging with the campaign group. They engaged 74 participants through meetings and discussions and successfully captured human-nature relationships across generations and cultures.

The campaign's workshop structure included three phases including an introduction to folklore, interactive learning through quizzes and networking, and local history integration looking specifically at bird populations across the West Midlands. The group carefully curated content produced or shared by residents of a West Midlands care home, including folklore elements such as traditional nursery rhymes like "One for sorrow, Two for joy," love-themed bird folklore such as turtle dove devotion spells, and death superstitions from crows announcing death, to magpies tapping windows as bad luck omens. Historical connections include folk songs like the 1260 verse "Sumer is icumen in. Lhude sing. Cuccu!"

While they produced their physical zines, they also promoted the campaign to friends and family networks through the social media platform, Instagram. The combined approach of physical zines and social media supported the NCC's multi-generational approach to community organising, raising awareness of some older generations' exclusion from nature and climate discussions, while inspiring involvement in activities like bird watches and litter picks.

The care home has since installed bird feeders and residents joined in with The Big Garden Bird Watch, demonstrating successful translation of the NCC's activity into practical nature connection and pro-environmental behaviours at both organisational and individual levels.

Campaign case study 2: Greenhousing

- **Issue:** Students living in the very urban district of Selly Oak in Birmingham face barriers to accessing nature during intensive exam periods, what with the area lacking nature in gardens and streets. This issue also reflects the wider problem of UK residents spending only 7% of their time outdoors on a weekly basis (86 minutes),
- **Approach:** This was a multi-faceted campaign combining door-to-door wildflower distribution, community planters, and social media engagement.
- **Audience:** There is a population of more than 10,000 students living in Selly Oak who are potentially impacted by this. The campaign also wanted to engage local businesses, community wardens, and student societies for sustainable impact.
- **Video log:** [Greenhousing: Nature Connection Campaign Journey](#).

The Greenhousing campaign emerged from the group sharing their experiences of being students in Birmingham's Selly Oak district, where over 10,000 students navigate daily commutes through urban landscapes lacking in opportunities for nature connection.

Selly Oak serves as the principal student district for the University of Birmingham, comprising over 1,500 houses. The campaign employed practical, hands-on activities focussed around planting and encouraging people to plant their own plants and take them home. The team distributed flyers and appeared at events hosted at Martineau Gardens, creating face-to-face community connections, and also used social media to share their activity.

Greenhousing understood the intersection of student lifestyle constraints and urban nature loss. Rather than requiring significant time commitments from time-pressed students, the campaign focussed on integrating nature connection into existing daily routines through strategic planter placement along commute routes to and from university buildings. The door-to-door seed distribution also took into consideration students' transient housing situations, providing simple nature connection opportunities without pressure. The group struggled with timing, noting the time of year was challenging for the student population, effecting both the group themselves and the community they were trying to engage.

Despite this, the campaign demonstrated good collaboration with organisations and businesses, including University of Birmingham Community Wardens and York Supplies who supported them. The social media component acknowledged students' digital engagement preferences while promoting offline nature connection activities. Garden tips and crafting content provided accessible entry points for students with no gardening experience, offering nature engagement regardless of prior knowledge or skill level.

The campaign positively impacted the quality of planters in the target area and helped to build a better awareness about the benefits of wildflowers and why we should promote the rewilding of spaces and make space for nature in urban areas, prompting conversations about urban biodiversity and ecological restoration among student populations.

Greenhousing bought together challenges of lacking biodiversity and student wellbeing by tackling nature disconnection during intensive academic periods, creating achievable pathways for nature connection.



Individual leadership development

To assess the impact of our programme on participants' development against our theory of change, we conducted surveys before and after the programme. These surveys helped us measure participants' development across key areas including skills, knowledge, confidence, networks and nature connection.

Response rates were a significant challenge, with only 17 sets of pre- and post-programme surveys completed by participants (69 completed pre-programme surveys). The upcoming 'Response rates' section of this report goes into more depth about this challenge and our plans to improve in Year 3.

Pre- and post-programme surveys

We assessed participant development across four outcome areas as identified in the ELP2's theory of change: confidence, knowledge, networks, and skills, using a scoring system that measures responses on a scale converted to percentages for analysis.

Among the 17 respondents, the programme achieved measurable improvements in 30 out of 31 measures, including:

- An average improvement of 11% across all measures
- The strongest improvements were seen in digital campaign skills and environmental advocacy knowledge
- Consistent improvement patterns were shown across all four development outcomes.

Confidence development was significant with an average improvement of +11 percentage points (70% pre-programme to 81% post-programme). The programme was particularly effective in building political self-efficacy and career confidence within this engaged segment of the cohort.

- "A person like me could do a good job as an MP" increased from 54% to 74% (+20 percentage points)
- "I feel confident that I can get a job in an industry I want to work in" improved from 67% to 82% (+15 percentage points)
- "When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the UK is run" rose from 72% to 85% (+13 percentage points)
- "If something goes wrong I am able to bounce back and carry on" increased from 75% to 87% (+12 percentage points).

Knowledge development was also strong, with a +12 percentage point improvement (77% to 82% average). The programme was

"The nine months I spent on the ELP2 programme absolutely disappeared from under my feet. Time really does fly when you're having fun, because the joy I got from my experience was unmatched."

So a huge thank you to Shropshire Wildlife Trust for launching the scheme, to the amazing Ellie, Rachel and everyone else behind the scenes, to Koru films for some gorgeous videos, and to our three amazing leads. To Benjamin (whose bird nerd-ery helped launch our NCC idea), Sofia (a phenomenal campaign support) and to Jen (who was the best tutor/go to I could ask for).

I'll never forget my ELP days, and I'll be carrying what you taught me for a long time."

ELP2 participant, July 2025

particularly successful in building understanding of environmental challenges and advocacy.

- "I feel equipped with the knowledge and skills to make change happen" increased from 62% to 83% (+21 percentage points)
- "I understand which organisations and individuals have power to make change happen" improved from 73% to 86% (+13 percentage points)
- "I have a good understand of current and future environmental challenges" rose from 84% to 94% (+10 percentage points)
- "I have a good understanding of how sociopolitical and environmental issues intersect" increased from 79% to 86% (+7 percentage points).

Network building achieved the most improvement at +19 percentage points (58% to 77% average) among the matched surveys. This represents the programme's highest impact area, proving it particularly valuable for building professional relationships and confidence in approaching senior stakeholders.

- "I have a network of contacts across different professional industries" increased from 36% to 65% (+29 percentage points)
- "I have the confidence to approach leaders for advice and guidance on issues I care about" improved from 59% to 84% (+25 percentage points)
- "I have a network of peers that support my ambitions" rose from 75% to 82% (+7 percentage points).

Skills development also demonstrated strong outcomes with a +15 percentage point improvement (70% to 85% average). The programme showed particular strength in building digital campaign and leadership skills.

- "I feel confident using social media and digital technologies to organise a social action campaign" increased from 51% to 83% (+32 percentage points) - this represents the single largest improvement area
- "I understand my strengths, opportunities and values as a leader" improved from 58% to 84% (+26 percentage points)
- "I understand the importance of, and how to go about, measuring the impact of a campaign" rose from 64% to 83% (+19 percentage points)
- "I am motivated to take action on issues in my community" increased from 67% to 82% (+15 percentage points).

Participant journeys

During their time on the programme, participants were invited to complete an individual Reflection Log. This offered participants a formal way to reflect on their journey, with logs sent out at the end of each term asking specific questions.

October - December

Online sessions:

- Welcome to ELP2
- Nature Connection 101
- Leadership 101
- Local and Global Issues
- The History of Movement Building

In person sessions:

- Launch Day
- Strategic Challenges
- Campaign Day 1

January - March

Online sessions:

- Power, Privilege and Identity
- Equity and Justice in the Climate Movement
- Impact and Evidence
- Developing your Pitch
- Campaign Kick-Off
- Careers in the Green Economy

In person sessions:

- Campaign Day 2
- Campaign Pitching: Dragon's Den

April - July

Online sessions:

- The Green Sector Landscape, Allyship and Advocacy
- Existing Power Structures
- Your Next Move

In person sessions:

- Power in Action: Visit to Parliament
- Graduation

The reflections reveal a powerful insight into participants' development and programme experience:

Building confidence and leadership - many participants entered the programme unsure of their abilities, particularly in public speaking and project management. Through activities like Dragons Den and campaign planning, they discovered new strengths:

- "Giving the pitch at Dragons Den – I was quite nervous beforehand, but everything turned out so much better than I expected!"
- "I have learnt so much about the effort and details that go into planning a community event. It has been really eye-opening."
- "I am more confident and capable than I thought I was."

This confidence extended beyond the programme, with participants applying their skills in job applications, volunteering, and future career planning.

Deepening connection to nature - nature connection was a cornerstone of the programme. Participants described becoming more mindful, observant, and emotionally engaged with the natural world:

- "I have noticed that I am a lot more present when I go on a walk and tend to notice little things a lot more: noises, smells and the different sights nature provides."
- "The nature connection activities have led to my biggest 'aha' moments. It has made me appreciate the nature around me and made me spot birds more when being out in nature."
- "Spending more time in the botanical gardens and just observing the different ways that nature can look like depending on the season has been moving."

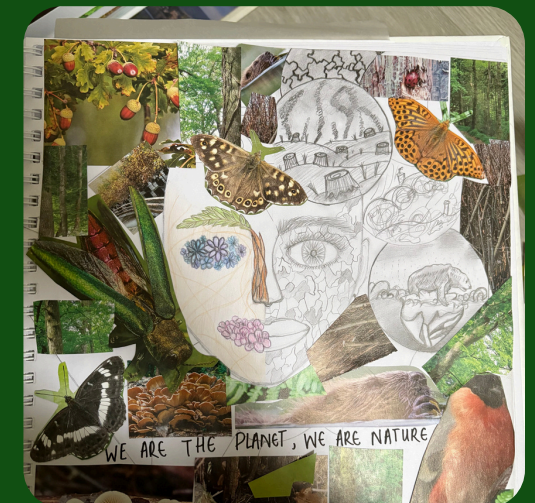
Finding community and shared purpose - participants consistently highlighted the value of meeting like-minded peers and forming supportive, collaborative groups. They articulated a sense of belonging and shared mission.

- "Getting to meet so many amazing and like-minded people."
- "Forming my NCC group! It was amazing to find a group of similar people who were really interested in learning about the niche interests we share."
- "I liked the conversations I had with people about why they joined the programme... we come from different backgrounds."

This community aspect helped participants feel empowered and less alone in their environmental passions.

Learning through experience - the programme's experiential design, combining online sessions, in-person events, and campaign work, was appreciated and valued. Memorable moments included the visit to Parliament, nature walks, and hands-on activities:

- "Seeing the MPs in parliament was good fun."
- "Bird walk during campaign day 2."



Art produced by participants as part of their monthly nature connection activities.

- “Planning and seeing our group's in-person event come to fruition.”

These experiences were not only enjoyable but also developmental, helping participants connect theory to practice and reflect on their role in environmental change.

Skills for the future - participants gained a wide range of skills, from project management and teamwork to environmental education and advocacy. Many expressed a desire to continue developing these skills and applying them in future roles:

- “Project management! It didn't always go completely smoothly but that meant I learned a lot from it.”
- “I wanted to learn more about the governmental systems in relation to the environment.”
- “I would like to develop my community organisation skills even further.”

These reflections show how the programme served as a springboard for future action and career development.

Reflections and recommendations - while feedback was overwhelmingly positive, participants offered thoughtful suggestions for improvement, such as more in-person sessions, earlier group formation, and greater speaker diversity:

- “More support on the campaign groups and more support during the initial set up.”
- “The only thing I may have benefited from is forming campaign groups and beginning NCC planning a little earlier.”
- “Would be good to get a bigger variety of guest speakers.”

These insights reflect a desire for even deeper engagement and support.

A lasting impact - the programme left a lasting impression on participants, many of whom strongly encouraged others to join:

- “Go for it! It is an amazing opportunity that you will remember forever.”
- “Definitely sign up – it's very much worth it!”
- “DO IT!! If you care about nature in any way it is worthwhile doing!”

Their words speak to the transformative power of the programme, not just as a learning experience, but as a catalyst for change.

Individual case studies

The two case studies below provide insight into the individual journeys of two programme participants.

Participant case study 1: Helen

Helen is an international student from Japan, living and studying in Birmingham during term time. She is a second-year Art and Design student at Birmingham City University. Growing up in a family that valued environmental consciousness, with parents who grew their own food, composted, and regularly took family hiking and camping trips, Helen developed an early connection to nature. However, she also experienced feelings of helplessness about environmental issues, describing how “it's always something that made me sad to think about, like about the planet in general because it felt like maybe there wasn't enough [being done] - for there's a lot of negative news and stuff like that. And so then I think in a sense it's a bit helpless, that sort of feeling before the programme.”

From a young age, Helen's career aspirations were set on teaching, viewing it as a way to “make a change in people's lives” through art and education. Helen was a student at Birmingham City University when she came across the programme, and applied thinking it would support her professional development and allow her to meet others her age who cared about nature and the future of the planet. Helen joined the programme seeking to transform her feelings of environmental helplessness into action. She was particularly interested in finding ways to integrate environmental knowledge with her existing career aspirations in teaching.

Helen particularly valued the “species spotlight and the different resources and materials that we've been provided of different ways and different opportunities that we could get into nature. Because I think that's something that I can definitely be then giving on to other people and like spreading.”



She also appreciated the hands-on experiences, such as “going through owl pellets” which she found “really, really interesting” and visiting “different parts of England and different places that I never would have been able to go because of public transportation and just I didn’t know it existed beforehand.”

The balance between online and offline elements worked well for Helen, who noted: “I think overall it was really good. It was a really good balance of online and offline where it was quite clear why there was a difference, because online would be quite a bit more like sessions where we’d be learning, whereas in person be more like group work doing different activities sort of thing. So the distinction between the two was quite good.”

The main challenge Helen identified was the campaign group formation process, noting “I did struggle at the beginning”. Helen explained how it was a bit daunting being introduced to a new group of people knowing they were going to be working together, but explained that with the support of the programme and team, she grew from this challenge, sharing it “worked out in the end.”

One of the most tangible impacts of the programme was Helen’s increased awareness of her immediate environment. She noted a significant change in her daily life: “I think the one big difference in my day-to-day life that I can see from after the programme is definitely noticing more birds... I didn’t realise the different birds that were around my house and that I could see every day, and now I sort of can start naming a few.”

The programme also supported Helen to feel more optimistic about environmental issues by allowing her to turn her concerns into action. She explained how the programme had prompted her to look for other ways to be involved in the environmental movement, with her plans now to join a sustainability society at her university: “I think [it] has helped... just that first step of taking action”. Furthermore, Helen was able to explore the opportunities she has moving forwards to bring sustainability to her own career path, exploring theories behind ‘green jobs’ and recognising that she can incorporate pro-environmental action into her teaching aspirations: “after the programme it’s made me more aware of things that then I can

incorporate into the design and art practise... the influence that I could have on the younger generation in terms of design and art and in schools... knowledge that I could gain from programmes like this is something that then I can pass on to like people when I eventually go into teaching and different careers and things like that.”

Helen’s leadership growth was evident in her recognition of complementary skills within the cohort: “Although I didn’t really know too much about the environment, because of the nature of the course that I’m on [at uni], where I have to collaborate with a lot of people and speak, doing public speaking and having to collaborate and sort of talk with people was something that was a skill that I had. Whereas maybe somebody else was way more knowledgeable on nature and the environment, but they didn’t have that skill to sort of share with people.” Helen shared that being able to identify her own strengths in this way, not comparing them to others, but instead complementing others in a team scenario, was really beneficial to her, and demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of collaborative leadership and the value of diverse skill sets in environmental work.

Helen articulated a compelling case for programmes like ELP2, emphasising their importance in providing “opportunities where people can young people can get involved and gain new experiences without cost”. She valued how the programme was “not only is it educational, it’s about the environment... So it’s not just knowledge, but it’s the different skills that we can then gain and take into society. And so it’s for our future as well.”

Significantly, Helen described the programme as “really empowering because it made me feel like I was doing something... it felt like I was gaining skills and tools and opportunities that then I could take out into the world and I can take more environmental action and different things sort of be more involved and have these different opportunities that I can then create by myself.” Helen’s case demonstrates the programme’s success in creating environmental leaders who will integrate their learning into their professional lives. Her commitment to incorporating environmental education into her future teaching career, combined with her increased environmental awareness and connection to nature, suggests long-term impact.

Participant case study 2: Lauren

Lauren is from Oswestry in North Shropshire, where she has lived all her life. Coming from a single-parent family with three siblings, she grew up in a household that "didn't really have tonnes of money" and relied on free school meals and welfare. Despite financial constraints, Lauren describes having "a great childhood" spent engaging with the local community through outdoor activities and library visits.

After completing a degree in German and Russian, Lauren secured a graduate position at the University of Chester before moving to her current role as Senior Information Assistant at the University of Birmingham. She describes her work as "a marriage between being a librarian and research support for health policy" - a role she had held for approximately nine months when the ELP2 programme began.

Lauren's decision to join the programme was driven primarily by curiosity. Following a difficult personal period about a year before the programme started, she had begun spending significantly more time outdoors hiking, gardening, and simply "sitting in the park." When she discovered ELP2 through Instagram and a poster at Climate Action Oswestry, she was particularly interested in the opportunity to connect the social aspects of environmental action with her personal values around community. As Lauren explained: "I've never really especially engaged in kind of the social aspect of kind of ELP. So the things like the community organising and all of that kinds of stuff, but community is something that I value very strongly. And I think to be able to kind of link those two things, that was something that I was really interested in."

Lauren found the programme's variety and flexibility to be its greatest strength, allowing participants to "engage with as much as you wanted to." Two elements



stood out as particularly impactful. The first was the Green Careers session which opened her eyes to possibilities she had never seriously considered, expanding her understanding of environmental career paths. The second was the programme of nature connection activities which provided real mental health benefits and served as "a really nice reminder to just kind of slow down to stop and just to engage really."

While Lauren appreciated the hybrid nature of the programme for its accessibility and flexibility, she shared that she did face challenges participating on a phone rather than a laptop. She found that platforms like Mighty Networks didn't work as well on mobile, and she found herself "a lot slower to engage than other people" during online sessions due to navigating on a small screen.

[Note from delivery team - the digital platform, Mighty Networks, was selected for its compatibility with mobile access, however our programmes team are looking into this carefully again ahead of Year 3 delivery.]

The programme fundamentally changed Lauren's conception of leadership. As someone who describes herself as "a relatively quiet person" who wouldn't naturally see herself as a leader, the collaborative approach of the Nature Connection Campaign was revelatory: "I think when I traditionally thought about leadership, I hadn't really considered [co-leadership] because... you think of your corporate leader in your management job and all of this. But I think it made leadership feel a lot more personable and a lot more kind of like realistic for me." This shift made her "more open to kind of looking at leadership opportunities or ways to get involved with things."

Lauren shared her improvements in several transferable skills, including networking, communication, teamwork and critical thinking: "I feel like I've massively improved. I think beforehand I have basically no idea how to kind of network in a meaningful way... [now I] think a little bit more critically about things and kind of evaluate where I stand with things... to stop taking things at face value and to not be afraid to question things or to disagree with things or to cause a bit of a fuss about things when it was appropriate and necessary."

Lauren's sense of empowerment to make a difference increased dramatically, with her now feeling "more empowered to kind of do things, scale or approach different groups or different people and kind of network professionally" and importantly, feels "more allowed to do that."

Climate change had previously been "a massive source of anxiety" and "stress" for Lauren. The programme helped transform this relationship by bringing people together to examine issues "through different kind of lenses and from different perspectives." Hearing from guest speakers made the challenges "feel empowering in some senses because it felt like actually there were things that we could do, no matter how small."

The programme also expanded Lauren's understanding of nature accessibility. Through her "Nibbles and Nature" campaign group, which organised family picnic and craft activities, she realised that traditional concepts of "spending time in nature" (like hiking in woods) can be exclusive. This led her to consider: "How can we bring nature to them? How can we make nature more accessible? How can we make it less kind of exclusive?"

Working in a community different from her own was particularly insightful for Lauren, helping her recognise that "some of the challenges for people in that area are different and some of them are the same." She observed how "everyone is so busy with so many different things and engaging with nature isn't a priority for a lot of people," making the success of their community event particularly meaningful.

Lauren's proudest leadership moment came during the Nature Connection Campaign when everything "all kind of came together." Despite initial overwhelm with risk assessments and their Dragons Den presentation, seeing their vision realised through collaborative leadership felt "really special" and made her "really proud that we were kind of able to kind of lead and developed that together."

Following the programme, Lauren has started volunteering at Lake Vyrnwy in Powys as a volunteer ranger and also participated in conservation work party days with the Oswestry branch of Shropshire Wildlife Trust. She is engaged in citizen science projects through her workplace involving tree measurements and plans to become more involved with her local climate action hub.

While Lauren doesn't plan to transition to a directly environmental career, citing that her "emotional energy is elsewhere" and concerns about eco-anxiety being incompatible with explicitly environmental professions, she recognises the value of the skills and relationships developed through ELP2. She particularly values the alumni network, including the LinkedIn group and ongoing friendships from her campaign group.

Lauren shared that the programme "absolutely" improved her well-being, particularly through nature connection activities and the programme community where they could "talk about things in our day-to-day lives that were a bit kind of similar or different."

She also emphasised the programme's uniqueness, particularly for her age bracket, noting she hadn't come across other opportunities like ELP2 and praised the programme for targeting "such a transformative age" with empowerment and confidence-building.

Lauren's experience with ELP2 demonstrates the programme's capacity to transform participants' understanding of leadership, environmental engagement, and community involvement. The skills, networks, and confidence gained have empowered her to take meaningful action in her community. Her journey from eco-anxiety to empowerment, and from feeling excluded from leadership opportunities to confidently co-leading community initiatives, illustrates the programme's success in developing accessible, collaborative approaches to environmental leadership.

Participant experience

We asked participants to rate the programme at the end of each term, to gather their perspectives on the quality of the programme and its delivery. For the 42 responses we received, here are the findings as average ratings out of 10:

- Facilitation and delivery - 9.35
- External speakers and facilitators - 9.09
- Overall experience - 9.53

The data reveals participants who submitted ratings felt they had a strong overall experience, with the programme offering real value to participants.



Photo produced by participants as part of their monthly nature connection activities.

Response rates

One of our ongoing challenges has been achieving consistent response rates for participant impact data collection. This has particularly been a problem for post-programme surveys.

Key challenges include:

- Low response rates requiring considerable staff time chasing participants to complete surveys and time pressures around reporting
- Difficulty capturing long-term impact data (3-month and 6-month follow-ups)
- Participant fatigue from multiple separate data collection touchpoints.

Progress and planned improvements

Learning from Year 1, we made some changes to our data collection processes this year by integrating the individual Nature Connection Campaign (NCC) survey into our post-programme survey, reducing separate touchpoints for participants. However, it's clear from both our post-programme survey response rates and our interviews with participants

that we need to simplify our participant impact data collection even further. This is a priority area of development for the programme team moving into Year 3, and this summer are exploring more systematic approaches that reduce burden on both participants and the staff team.

Planned changes include:

- We will integrate data collection with programme delivery, allocating dedicated time within programme sessions and contact hours for essential data collection, including completion of the post-programme survey and post-programme reflections, and capturing the post-programme Nature Connection Index as part of regular programme experience rather than an additional task.
- We are restructuring the reflection schedule, streamlining termly reflections from three separate collection points to two, combining the first with our mid-programme 1-2-1 with Team Leaders, and embedding the final reflection into session time.
- We aim to capture more conversation-based data in Year 3 with our MEI lead being present at more in-person events to speak with participants. We will also have dedicated days at the end of each term for the delivery team to 'download' their observations and conversations with participants to the MEI lead in a more consistent and strategic way.
- We will make mid- and long-term data collection more appealing for alumni members. Acknowledging the difficulties of capturing three- and six-month post-programme data we will trial focus group approaches instead of individual surveys, with a networking or 'reunion' style online event with an item for reconnection, an item for data collection and the incentive of a guest speaker around the four-month post programme mark.
- Several strategic changes are planned to address engagement challenges. The curriculum is being restructured to introduce campaigning content earlier in the programme, helping to reduce the overwhelm experienced by participants in Term 3.
- To improve data collection and relationship building, Team Leader calls will be repositioned as essential rather than optional components. They will be introduced at the start of the programme and will be booked in diaries pre-Christmas break, to take place in February (mid-programme), providing crucial opportunities to troubleshoot concerns, collect qualitative participant data and address engagement issues before they impact participation with campaign delivery.
- We will make efforts to build a more active online community. In Year 3 we will be transferring the programme communication platform from Slack to Discord. Discord is a communication and gaming platform widely used by young people already, which The Wildlife Trusts is utilising to begin bringing together a movement of young people to engage with the environmental sector. Within The Wildlife Trusts' server, ELP2 will have its own dedicated space for participants, for facilitation of programme communications and connection to other groups of young people engaging with Trusts, as well as access to a range of additional features such as group watches of films, games and creativity.

Conclusion

Year 2 of the ELP2 has demonstrated the transformative potential of combining environmental education with hands-on community action and nature connection experiences for young people. Despite challenges with participant retention and data collection, the programme achieved great outcomes for engaged participants.

Wider and better recruitment and retention of participants remains our primary challenge, with the programme graduating 36 participants this year, and survey response rates declining from 69 participants at programme start to 17 completed post-programme. Recruiting truly diverse cohorts—particularly engaging young people outside of university settings—remains a priority requiring continued innovation in outreach strategies, with even more emphasis now the programme has its home within The Wildlife Trusts. As we explore these challenges through our Share, Learn, Improve function, we are optimistic and committed to being a leader in building a more diverse environmental youth movement.

As we prepare for Year 3, planned curriculum restructuring and evolution of our Nature Connection Campaigning element of the programme are also underway.

Ultimately, ELP2 proves that when young people are provided with meaningful opportunities to connect with nature, develop skills, and take community action, they become powerful agents of environmental change. The programme's success in transforming eco-anxiety into empowerment and fostering deep nature connection creates ripple effects extending beyond the immediate cohort, and it is this movement building nature of the programme we are working hard to unlock further.

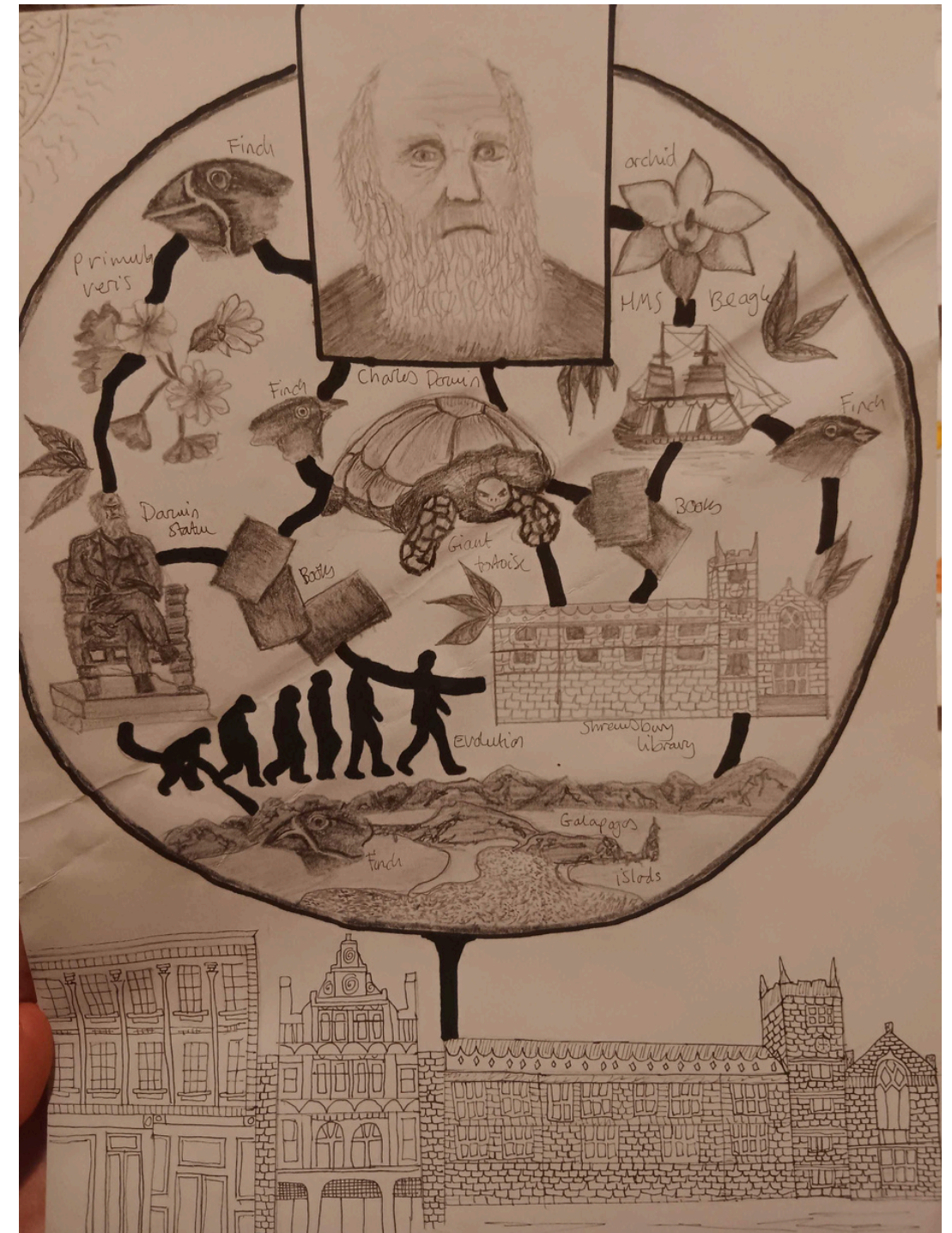


Photo produced by participants as part of their monthly nature connection activities.



Photo produced by participants as part of their monthly nature connection activities.



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