



## National Parks for Health and Wellbeing: The Experience of Mosaic in Wales



Campaign for National Parks  
May 2015

Mosaic funders



Mosaic Welsh partners



## National Parks for Health and Wellbeing: The Experience of Mosaic in Wales

*'When I visited the Park with my girls I saw the joy in their faces, and how they thrived in the fresh air. It was uplifting to be there with them.'* Pembrokeshire Coast Community Champion

### Introduction

The Campaign for National Parks' Mosaic project in Wales set out to build sustainable engagement between National Parks and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. It ran from 2012 and 2015 in partnership with all three Welsh National Parks and the YHA. It was based on the premise that National Parks are there for everyone in the UK to use, understand and enjoy and that people from BME backgrounds are under-represented amongst National Park visitors.

The Campaign for National Parks has been running Mosaic projects with BME communities across England and Wales since 2001 and we have learnt there are many reasons why people haven't visited National Parks before – for example, having no culture of visiting the British countryside, not knowing it's possible, poor transport links, thinking they will feel out of place. We also know from external evaluations and internal monitoring that almost all the people who experienced National Parks for the first time through Mosaic had a great time and wanted to return; being in amazing countryside made them feel good. In the later part of the Mosaic project in Wales, we started to really understand the positive impact that being involved in National Parks was having on visitors and Mosaic volunteers, or 'Community Champions'<sup>1</sup>. Community Champions told us that they feel healthier and happier and that they have seen positive impacts on how people in their families or communities relate to each other. They attributed these positive impacts to both their involvement in Mosaic and their experiences in National Parks.

We didn't set out to achieve this but decided to examine these positive impacts further during the final year of the Mosaic project (between April 2014 and March 2015). Understanding these impacts is particularly relevant today. The Welsh Government, through The Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015<sup>2</sup>, states that certain public bodies should put the wellbeing of Welsh people and communities at the heart of what they do – including National Park Authorities. Health inequalities are growing wider and there is recognition among public health boards of the value of green space in improving mental and physical health and wellbeing<sup>3</sup>. This paper describes some of the benefits and impacts felt and described by Community Champions with the Mosaic project in Wales. It recognises that some of the benefits reported may be a result of their engagement with National Parks as volunteer Community Champions through Mosaic and some are simply as a result of being in the inspirational landscapes of National Parks.

We produced an earlier paper on health and wellbeing in April 2014, which discusses some of the issues they raised<sup>4</sup>. To build on the conclusions of this paper we conducted a series of interviews with 20 Community Champions at the end of the Mosaic project. The Champions talked about

---

<sup>1</sup> For further information on how the Mosaic project works, please see the Mosaic pages on our website [www.cnp.org.uk](http://www.cnp.org.uk)

<sup>2</sup> (For further details see <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/future-generations-bill/?lang=en>)

<sup>3</sup> For example, Director of Public Health Board 2012-13 Annual Report, Chapter 8

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, Investigating the impact of National Parks on Health and Wellbeing, May 2014  
<http://www.cnp.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploadsfiles/140530%20Impact%20of%20National%20Parks%20on%20Health%20and%20Wellbeing.pdf>

what they had got out of being involved in National Parks through Mosaic. This paper<sup>5</sup> reports on those interviews. We start with a short description of the Mosaic project, then briefly describe the impacts of using and volunteering in National Parks and finally discuss what the main drivers were.

## **1. Mosaic project background**

Mosaic aims to cement long term engagement between BME communities and National Parks in Wales. We do this through two main strands of activity:

1. Recruiting, training and supporting volunteer Community Champions who get to know the National Park closest to where they live and promote it to others in their community through organising visits, talks etc.
2. Working with National Park Authorities and YHA on becoming more accessible to BME communities both in terms of visitors and governance.

Organising visits for family or community members forms a large part of what Community Champions do and most focus on these visits, together with training visits organised by the Mosaic project when talking about the beneficial impact of National Parks.

The Mosaic model rests on six underlying principals; enjoyment, choice (making a positive choice to use National Parks), empowerment (supporting Champions to take their involvement in National Parks in the direction they want to), facilitating personal relationships (recognition that this is the basis for most change), being flexible (to variable local situations for example) and remaining a temporary intervention (i.e. constantly preparing for when the project ends).

Mosaic in Wales ran from 2012 to 2015 and recruited 68 Community Champions from Wales' five biggest urban centres: Cardiff, Newport, Bangor, Wrexham and Swansea. Between them they gained an impressive knowledge of Wales' three National Parks and introduced over 2,000 new visitors to National Parks as well as taking part in a range of activities with the National Park Authorities to advise on how to increase access for BME communities.

## **2. What National Parks do for Us**

This section groups the positive impacts that Champions told us about into five categories – feeling great (wellbeing), feeling fitter (physical health), community cohesion, identity and feeling more confident.

### **2.1 I feel great! It lasts. I'm happier. I've found a way to let go of stress.**

*'The psychological restoration and stress reduction is what everyone talks about when you ask them about how they feel after visiting the national park.'* Brecon Beacons Community Champion

All the Champions talked in some way about feeling happier or healthier as a result of visiting National Parks. They put it down to a range of reasons – the fresh air, the beautiful landscapes, being out of your normal situation, relaxing with friends and family, showing others and watching their faces when they experience these amazing places. Most also claimed that the people they take on visits to National Parks also feel better as a result of the visit.

---

<sup>5</sup> This paper was put together with the support of Natural Resources Wales

*'The men in our community sometimes have this aggression; and sometimes there is conflict under the surface between different groups. You really noticed that disappeared when we visited the waterfalls.'* Brecon Beacons Community Champion

*'While I was there I forgot all about Barry and my family while looking at the green colours which gives us calmness, I love the stress free life in Brecon away from our mobile phones, TV's and laptops which allowed us to socialise, play games and re-live our childhood memories once more.'* Brecon Beacons Community Champion

*'The beach at Broadhaven is amazing. We felt free. The children didn't want to leave.'* Pembrokeshire Coast Community Champion

*'In town today I went past a building with a gym upstairs and I could see women using the gym, cycling hard, with their headphones on and their minds elsewhere. Being out in the countryside connects you with the landscape, the spirit of the place, your senses soak up all these things, the birds, the wind. You feel part of it. It re-charges your batteries. You can walk and walk. But if you walk and walk when shopping in town it drains you.'* Pembrokeshire Coast Community Champion

## **2.2 I'm more conscious about my health. I do more physical activity now**

*'The National Park has worked better than the medicines in making us feel better.'* Brecon Beacons Community Champion

Most of the Champions explain that they are more conscious about physical exercise as a result of spending time in National Parks. Taking exercise becomes more accessible because it is more enjoyable or there is greater reason to do it (aiming to climb a mountain for example). Several Champions said they, and other people they took to National Parks do more physical exercise since using the Parks. Champions also talked about how they have come to view National Parks as both a preventative measure to getting sick, or even an alternative to medicine for some conditions. They linked the beauty of National Parks and opportunity for enjoyable physical exercise with overall better health and reducing illness.

*'I've always been a walker but now I'm far more motivated; the same with healthy eating, I'm now more motivated to eat healthier. Cycling – it was the first time [I've] been on a bike in 10 years, now after cycling in that amazing place, I'm getting a bicycle. Swimming – Mosaic experience not [sic] just prompted me to learn to swim, I feel far more comfortable in the water.'* Snowdonia Community Champion

*'After walking up Snowdon, I started to walk to work (4.5 miles away) and back twice a week. That's a total of 18 miles each week!'* Snowdonia Community Champion

*'A lot of people in our communities have cardiovascular disease, heart disease, arthritis and so on. When we started coming out to the National Park we started feeling the difference to our health*

*and we noticed how being outdoors and the environment helps us to manage our health better. It also motivated me to start doing more physical activities for the women's group I run.'* Brecon Beacons Community Champion

### **2.3 This is a great way to get together with people. It gives us an excuse to do something together.**

*'People who visit our centre [for refugees and asylum seekers] are from all places, but often they don't get to connect with each other properly when they meet there. But on trips to Pembrokeshire they are thrown together more closely and it gives them a chance to get to know each other.'* Pembrokeshire Coast Community Champion

Champions talked about cohesion and getting to know others on three levels. The first, and mentioned by almost everyone (19 out of 20 Champions), was the value of getting to know other Champions and National Park staff from such a wide range ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds. There was power in such a diverse group of people getting together in a National Park and doing fun, sometimes challenging, things together. Many Champions went on to organise trips together, some formed new organisations (e.g. a group of Pembrokeshire Coast Champions formed the group Diversity Outdoors after spending one weekend together in Pembrokeshire), meet each other socially outside Mosaic activities. This can be overlooked since the broad definition 'BME' sometimes overlooks the huge diversity contained within the term.

*'We learnt about each other, our communities, our religions, values and beliefs and we did so many things together, had fun and got on, learnt to respect each other and our differences.'* Brecon Beacons Community Champion

*'You hear so many negative things about communities in the media and around us. The negative media and stereotyping of groups and communities makes it very difficult to get to know people or counter the negative things. Through Mosaic, people of all faith and religion came together. We got to know each other so well, some of us are now very good friends and always support each other with our work.'* Brecon Beacons Community Champion

The second area, related to the first, was getting together with people who live and/or work in the National Parks. Champions got a lot out of these relationships and many talked about the understanding they gained from learning about rural culture and economy. They gained an appreciation of rural Welsh issues. The external evaluation of the Mosaic project noted that rural community organisations were also extremely positive about their interactions with Champions<sup>6</sup>.

*'I understand the important role local services have in Snowdonia. For example, it may be cheaper*

---

<sup>6</sup> Gilfillan Associates, Mosaic Wales Final Evaluation Report, February 2015

*to take your own sandwiches, but in the cafe here, you can eat comfortably if the weather's not good and you meet other people there too. It makes sense to support the cafe. A group of 10 people having lunch there makes a real difference to their takings in the low season'. Snowdonia Community Champion*

*'We met people on the trail, had some great conversations. There was a lady who was local, but had moved away and then came back. We talked about jobs in the area, and how you found them by networking.'* Pembrokeshire Coast Community Champion

Many champions explained that National Parks provide an exceptional venue for community activity which in turn brings people together. The beauty, good recreational activities, the fact it's a 'special place' and the fact it is not expensive provide a perfect opportunity for people to organise trips or to go out there together.

*'The Brecon Beacons is a reason to take out the women's group... Normally they don't get to spend time together doing something they enjoy themselves. National Parks have given us a space to do this.'* Brecon Beacons Community Champion

*'I joined when I was dealing with other matters that were only isolating and excluding me from full participation in community life but thanks to Mosaic, I gained alternative access to participate in community activities which normally requires resources I did not have. It was great for me to be part of a community.'* Pembrokeshire Coast Community Champion

#### **2.4 I feel more Welsh. I understand my identity better**

*'It's amazing to be able to talk to other people about Welsh National Parks! Me, a Ghanian!'* Pembrokeshire Coast Community Champion

Some Champions started volunteering with Mosaic as a way to integrate more in Wales and 'feel more Welsh' or British. For others a new identity and responsibility appeared as they got to know the National Parks and Welsh countryside. They felt a greater sense of belonging to that countryside and by extension, Wales. They got to know more local people and understand the local economy which made them care about it more and share it with others.

*'Mosaic made me feel more integrated; more at home in north Wales. It made me feel more involved, really part of it, owning part of it. I am part of this place and I want to do my part. I'm there now in Wrexham telling people about Snowdonia, the farmers, the slate, other National Parks.'* Snowdonia Community Champion

*'I volunteered with Mosaic because I wanted to do something to make me feel like part of the British community. I wanted to be integrated. It's been very helpful for that.'* Pembrokeshire Coast Community Champion

Many champions, especially those born outside the UK, recount first experiences in National Parks as pivotal moments in feeling 'at home' in the UK. The connection to nature gained through a visit to a National Park reminded them of home and gave them a connection to home. It's an important part of settling in a new country, to find familiarity.

*'Some people connected some of the places in the Park to their country of birth and they felt close to their villages and home.'* Brecon Beacons Community Champion

Many people never expected to feel 'at home' in National Parks but thought they would always feel different. In fact the opposite was normally the case.

*'The relationships with the staff (NPA) and also other people we have met, such as activity providers, made us feel part of the National Parks and created a better sense of belonging for a lot of us.'* Brecon Beacons Community Champion

The inspiration, relaxation and belonging that many Champions felt in National Parks made them want to share it with others. They have become 'Champions' or ambassadors for Wales' National Parks. They are not only introducing friends, family and acquaintances to beautiful places, but undertaking an act of citizenship and responsibility by doing so.

*'This is my homeland now. Doing Mosaic has made me feel more at home. It's made me also feel a new responsibility as a person from an ethnic minority to get others from BME communities involved.'* Snowdonia Community Champion

*'I gained a lot of knowledge about National Parks, about community, social inclusion, being a good citizen, heritage, cultures and people. This will go with me wherever I will go.'* Pembrokeshire Coast Community Champion

*'I used to think the National Parks are only for the professional walkers but I know now that people like myself who enjoy walking and are passionate about the national parks can enjoy walking in the national parks like anyone else. The national parks are open to all regardless of ethnic origin, age or gender and they can be a vehicle for active citizenship and more equal society.'* Brecon Beacons Community Champion

## **2.5 I'm more confident. I know more.**

We aimed to assist Champions to gain new skills that would help them to promote and play an active role in Wales's National Parks. Almost all (18 out of 20) Champions reported greater confidence and knowledge that enabled them to show people the National Parks, read maps, lead walks, organise trips, haggle for cheaper coach hire, book overnight accommodation or be assertive when something was not quite right. However many also reported gaining deeper confidence in other areas of their lives through their activities in National Parks as Mosaic Community Champions.

*'I have discovered more about myself. By becoming a member of the equality forum, I really saw that I could be useful.'* Snowdonia Community Champion

*'For a lot of the people, it was the first time they were going somewhere independently without a family member with them. It built their confidence; they really enjoyed getting away from day to day stress and all felt motivated to push themselves to try physical activities they would normally not be able to do. A carer described how after a weekend in Brecon she felt her batteries were recharged and she felt so refreshed and thought she could go on for another six months.'* Brecon Beacons Community Champion

*'Since becoming involved, I have started volunteering with an organisation and now I am on the Board of that organisation. Meeting with the members, presenting to them and at other events increased my confidence and helped me focus on my goals. I'm now hoping to shadow a [National Park Authority] member<sup>7</sup> and think it's a great way to involve people from our communities in learning about how decisions are made and organisations operate.'* Brecon Beacons Community Champion

*'Joining Mosaic helped me to build confidence. After one year I become the chair of the Rainbow Women's Group where I had the confidence to manage the funding, arrange activities, do the accounts and much more.'* Brecon Beacons Community Champion

## **2.6 The Five Ways to Wellbeing**

The beneficial impacts of being involved with National Parks through Mosaic listed above are related to overall wellbeing. Indeed the benefits seen through Mosaic can be said to reflect the New Economic Foundations widely accepted 'Five Ways to Wellbeing'<sup>8</sup>

**Connect:** This relates to connecting to people around you. Mosaic Champions connected more with family, friends, their communities and new people through visiting National Parks and organising visits to them.

**Be active:** Almost all Champions reported feeling fitter and being inspired to do more physical exercise as a result of being involved in National Parks.

**Take Notice:** Champions were connecting with the landscapes and people of National Parks. Many said they couldn't help but take notice of the inspirational landscapes and be motivated to point them out to others.

**Keep Learning:** Mosaic emphasises learning new skills and gaining confidence. Champions used National Parks to learn new skills and new things themselves and to give others the opportunity to do that.

**Give:** Almost all champions commented on the value of showing National Parks to other people for the first time or the value they got from doing conservation volunteering. Conservation

---

<sup>7</sup> Through a new Welsh government scheme to promote greater diversity on public boards

<sup>8</sup> Aged, J. Et al. 'Five Ways to Wellbeing', New Economics Foundation, 2008



volunteering for some was a very clear way of feeling they were 'putting something back' as well as understanding the landscape better and feeling a sense of 'ownership' over it.

### **3. Mosaic? National Parks? Volunteering? What causes these positive impacts?**

**3.1 National Parks** provide an extraordinary setting for activities. Organising a visit to a National Park brought people together. They wanted to experience it – especially after they had been once. Over and over Champions talked about the release, joy, relaxation, calmness, inspiration they felt when they spent time in the open spaces, landscapes and seascapes of National Parks. They said this feeling lasted for a long time after they went back home.

Champions also explain that the special landscapes inspired them to try new things or change their habits – to do more physical exercise, or think more about conservation and environmental issues. They felt this wouldn't have happened if they were in more ordinary landscapes or in city parks.

*'It's an excuse to be outside. If you suffer from stress and depression it's the perfect way to get away from it.'* Brecon Beacons Community Champion

**3.2 Mosaic** created opportunities to do activities in and learn about these extraordinary places. Champions gained knowledge and confidence through the project which they would not have otherwise done. Perhaps more importantly Mosaic opened doors – Champions met other Champions, staff and volunteers from National Parks, local business people, farmers, Welsh Assembly Members, National Park Members, campaigners and other enthusiasts. Personal relationships developed which in turn made Champions more confident about how they engage with National Parks and feel they could have some influence in National Parks or other areas of interest. Personal relationships also helped people feel at home and gain a deeper understanding of Wales, it's people and economy.

Many Champions identified the support they received from the Mosaic project team as a critical element to gaining confidence and knowledge. The project team is structured so that one project officer recruits and supports Champions affiliated to one National Park (making a team of three in Wales, one project officer per National Park). The officers provide the Champions with a framework to guide their activities, personal support and mentoring and links to people or places which fit their interests. Project officers also organise initial visits to National Parks and training for Champions. The emphasis is on supporting Champions to do what they would like to do with the role rather than asking them to fit into a prescribed role.

*'Without the support from Pat I never would have had the confidence to call up the bus company and haggle to get an affordable price! She challenged me but also made me feel I could do it!'*  
Pembrokeshire Coast Community Champion

**3.3 Mosaic is also about volunteering** to promote National Parks. Over half of the Champions interviewed talked about the value of 'seeing the joy on people's faces' or watching people enjoying the National Park. When asked, some said that having a specific volunteer role to promote the National Park made their experiences in National Parks better. It became more than just enjoying it.

As noted above, several Champions commented positively about conservation volunteering in terms of putting something back, better understanding the landscape, doing a positive activity with other people and gaining fitness.

*'We helped other people to visit new beautiful places. It gives you joy, satisfaction, happiness to introduce them to these places. Without our support they'd never do it for many reasons.'*

Pembrokeshire Coast Community Champion

## **Conclusion**

The Mosaic approach of facilitating new relationships and mentoring and supporting Champions combined with the extraordinary settings of National Parks has created a group of people who are more confident, more at home in Wales, more able to promote National Parks in ways that work and speak up for National Parks in Wales. The unique mix of enjoyment and empowerment in these spectacular landscapes provides a strong recipe for better wellbeing. This short report shows one way in which National Park Authorities can have real social impacts on communities living outside the boundaries of National Parks.