

POSTER ABSTRACT

Healthy Young Minds: co-produced nature interventions with rural school pupils to promote health, well-being and resilience

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Background: Poor mental health is experienced by many young people, posing a significant global health challenge particularly post-COVID-19. Rural school students face added disadvantages impacting their mental health, e.g. geographical isolation, poor public transport, broadband connectivity and access to services. The aim is to co-produce nature-based well-being interventions to be delivered in early adolescence when mental health problems often arise. We aim to promote mental well-being, reduce anxiety and increase resilience through engagement with nature and greenspaces.

Approach: The interventions are coproduced with students aged 11-14. We use research evidence, professional input from project partners, including the NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, and interview/focus groups data from our stakeholder groups (comprising young people with lived experience of mental health issues & rural living, 3rd sector groups, health professionals, statutory service providers). From 2024-5 we ran a series of coproduction workshops in 5 rural secondary schools in the Scottish Highlands facilitated by a 3rd sector mental health organisation and a nature-based well-being activities organisation. Data from interviews, focus groups and non-participant observation were analysed thematically.

Results: Interview and focus group data indicate a notable rise in anxiety in rural pupils and pressure on school and NHS services, particularly post covid 19. Workshops increased awareness of the benefits of nature engagement and barriers for rural young people were highlighted. Access to nature in very rural areas is often contingent and variable. The project demonstrated that the context in which coproduction is conducted with young people is significant.

Implications: Coproduction increases chances of engagement and developing interventions acceptable to young people to meet their needs. Young people's awareness that nature engagement benefits mental well-being can be raised through coproduction. Nature-based interventions codesigned by the young people will be trialled in a follow-on pilot. The main messages are that coproduction supports meaningful engagement in intervention development and we can increase young people's awareness & understanding of benefits of nature/green space as a mental well-being resource.

