

Communities in Nature

Final Report for the Hidden Voices Project at
Westonbirt, The National Arboretum

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Acknowledgements

The Hidden Voices Project has involved many people, without whom it would not have been such a success.

In particular the Westonbirt Learning Team would like to thank: Louisa and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation for not only providing funding for the project but also their drive to change the social role of botanic gardens for the better; Julia and Asimina from BGCI for choosing Westonbirt in the first place and for their ongoing support and enthusiasm; Katrina and Gina from the Westonbirt marketing team who helped communicate our project internally and externally; our dedicated volunteers who once again have come up trumps; our Friends Charity for providing ongoing financial support for our learning activities; the group leaders, Pete, Sandra and Simi, who have helped develop the project and been our voice within their respective community groups; and finally, most importantly, to all the participants for taking an active role in our Project.

List of abbreviations and/or glossary

ALVA	Association of Leading Visitor Attractions
AU	Awaz Utaoh
BDP	Bristol Drugs Project
BME	Black and Minority Ethnicns
FC	Forestry Commission
FOWA	Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum Charity
HV	Hidden Voices
SMDS	Stroud Macular Disease Society

Executive summary

Introduction

In common with most botanic gardens Westonbirt's mission and objectives are influenced by a mixture of conservation, education and community related policies summed up in our Mission: '*to connect people with trees to improve the quality of life*'. As part of this Mission we are committed to enabling more people to forge meaningful connections with trees and the environment.

However, our visitor surveys show that currently we are failing to attract/serve certain audiences within our catchment area. These under-represented audiences include young people, disadvantaged adults and BME communities. We have also identified older people at risk of exclusion as a priority audience for Westonbirt, as although the site already attracts large numbers of older visitors, reports highlight a growing risk of social isolation amongst older people living within our catchment area, exacerbated by rural living and disability.

Extensive research on the barriers that prevent different audiences from accessing the environment, corroborated by our own findings, identifies that a significant challenge to broadening our visitor base is that some communities do not see Westonbirt as a 'place for them'. Combined with the high costs of visiting Westonbirt and inexperience of staff to engage with these groups, it is unsurprising that these audiences do not visit. The Hidden Voices Project was specifically designed to address these barriers by developing regular visits and a collaborative approach to planning / development of activities with community groups serving these audiences. Through the project we hoped to develop more sustained relationships, give staff/volunteers confidence to work with groups outside our traditional 'comfort zone', and create a creative legacy to share with other visitors to promote the project and the social role of the arboretum.

Group selection and delivering our project

Having identified the audiences currently under-represented within our visitor profile, we looked to select different community partners that already work within these audiences as we believed this to be the most effective way of reaching out into the community. Given the relatively short timescale for preparing our project application we felt that it was prudent to approach groups that we had worked with in the past. This decision was based on the rationale that these prior experiences would mean that group leaders would have at least some understanding of Westonbirt and it's potential to meet their client's needs. The three groups selected were:

- Bristol Drugs Project; working with disadvantaged adults - an independent agency that works with drug users, their relatives and friends to reduce drug and alcohol-related harm
- Awaz Utaoh; working with communities from different ethnicities - works within Bristol's South Asian communities to tackle issues such as community segregation / isolation
- Stroud Macular Disease Society; working with older people at risk of exclusion - provides support to anyone who has lost any degree of central vision through Macular Disease

In delivering our project we set out a clear framework based on each group visiting on a monthly basis for six months followed by a final celebration. Our plan broke the project into distinct phases: (1) community visit to meet the group; (2) taster sessions to further gauge participant interests; (3/4) immersion sessions to build participants' understanding of the identified environmental themes through different activities; (5/6) creative response sessions focused on development of the creative project for each group; (7) an individual group celebration and reflection session; and finally (8) final celebration, bringing all the groups together.

In reality we quickly found that a more flexible approach was essential as our initial plans were too rigid to accommodate the different opportunities, constraints and challenges each group presented us with. In particular it became clear that each group had strong individual reasons for taking part in the project and these did not always match up with our objectives.

Overall the project delivered 21 group visits to 420 participants (approx. 112 individuals as many of the participants came on multiple visits), involving 12 members of staff from all arboretum teams and 22 volunteers (approximately 214 hours).

Results and evaluation

The HV project was a success; despite the challenges we achieved almost all of our ambitious objectives. As well as developing deeper links with the community groups involved we demonstrated an effective collaborative approach to developing community engagement projects and in the process succeeded in changing perceptions of staff and volunteers. Full feedback and comments are outlined in Section 3. Some specific outcome highlights include:

- HV raised participants' self esteem.

'I've really enjoyed taking part in the project, getting to try new things and meet new people. The site is uplifting and good for confidence building and to escape from the city' **(BDP)**

'Because we don't speak English and we dress as we do, people often think we can't do anything – but look at what this lady has done' **Simi, (AU Group Leader)**

'Taking part has been fantastic. I've been amazed with the willow weaving and have been able to teach it to St Dunstan's group in Wales (Blind Veterans UK) so that they can do it in their craft workshop' **Ken (SMDS)**

- HV enabled participants to make personal connections to the arboretum

'I didn't know Westonbirt until I had an opportunity to visit through BDP and I absolutely love it, great, great place. To tell you honestly, sometimes when I feel sad or down, this place comes to mind and I feel better; I have gained more serenity, awareness and a sense of belonging' **Jorge (BDP)**

'I've been really looking forward to this visit – I couldn't sleep last night I was so excited' **Olive, (SMDS)**

'I've seen more trees, trees from my dreams that have now come true. Some of them I've seen back home; they are the trees from my dreams. And when I see a tree I like I want to share it with my children' **(AU participant)**

- HV enabled participants to form friendships with staff and volunteers

'Most of all I have enjoyed taking part and feeling part of the show' **Chris (SMDS)**

'It has opened the place up as a broader 'community' resource rather than seeing it as selective/privileged activity to people with the money or their own transport' **Pete (BDP leader)**

'We of the Stroud Macular Disease Society consider you as our friends now. We thank you all so much for the care you have taken with us all, the wonderful walks amongst the trees.' **Helen (SMDS)**

- HV had a positive effect on staff perception of Westonbirt's social role and challenged traditional views – particularly among our volunteers.

'Seeing the Asian women's group Awaz Utaoh get so much from their experiences at the arboretum convinces me that engaging hard-to-reach groups should be central to what we do in future... I believe that the Hidden Voices project will provide a strong foundation of experience which will inform our approach to this kind of work in the future.' **Gina Mills**

'I think it has challenged our perceptions of ourselves (The Arboretum) and how really inclusive we are. It has also made us aware that other visitor groups (and perhaps even members of staff) retain an exclusive attitude to the arboretum. They are more comfortable with our traditional visitor profile and do not always embrace a wider social role or visitor profile.' **Simon Toomer**

How were my own perceptions altered? I think I was surprised by the energy and vitality of many of the women, and by the gusto with which they tackled the activities! **Pauline Thomas, Volunteer with AU**

Prior to the project the only experience I had of drug addicts was through the mass media. It is now clear to me how narrow and stereotyped this view was. Having now worked with them for 5 or 6 days, I realise that they are just like the rest of us. It has opened my eyes to a section of society that I'd deliberately avoided beforehand. **Graham Ansty, Volunteer with BDP**

- The collaborative approach developed through the project enabled considerable team development on project management, sharing/negotiating session objectives and working with new audiences.

Challenges and conclusions

Of course HV was not without challenges; but then learning about how to develop community projects (including the pitfalls) was a core project objective. Areas where we can improve include (1) communication with group leaders (2) fitting in projects with other core work (3) carrying out evaluation and (4) sharing responsibility. Through both the successes and challenges of the HV project we developed a blueprint for developing successful community projects in future. Key recommendations are

- 1 Double the time allowed; plan in contingency
- 2 Early, in-depth discussions with community groups
- 3 Pay particular attention to group leaders; they are the 'gatekeepers'
- 4 Involve the wider team
- 5 Start from where the individuals are at
- 6 The importance of sharing
- 7 Have a 'take home' element
- 8 Plan for relaxed control
- 9 Train volunteers so that they understand their role; select carefully
- 10 Separate evaluation from delivery

Next steps; the legacy of our Hidden Voices Project

The successes of the HV project support the delivery of a number of key strategic work areas currently being undertaken; these include the Forestry Commission's current review of learning services; Westonbirt's own development plans and phase 2 HLF application; and the aspirations

of the Independent Panel's Report on the future of Forestry. Given the pressure on resources we believe it is right to give time for the strategic direction to become clearer. At the same time we will continue to use the success of the HV project to influence/promote the positive social role Westonbirt could have in future and we have identified a number of milestones to ensure that the social remit for Westonbirt moves forward. These include:

1. Define and integrate Westonbirt's social role into our 5-year strategic plan and feed this into our new learning delivery plan, due in March 2013
2. Meet with our community partners to arrange 'keeping in touch visits' and explore funding opportunities
3. Meet with the volunteers involved to see how we can harness their enthusiasm; for example in taking ownership of some of the management and / or delivery of future projects
4. Explore interest from other community partners and in particular look at how we can use the successes of the HV project to develop scale-able elements that target the needs of particular groups.

1. Introduction

This section provides a brief overview of Westonbirt in terms of its Mission and current audience profile. It explores the potential underlying reasons behind our failure to attract certain audiences and outlines how our Hidden Voices project aimed to overcome the perceived barriers to accessing our 'offer'.

1.1 Background to Westonbirt

Westonbirt, The National Arboretum is one of the finest collections of temperate trees and shrubs in the world. Originally planted by the Holford family in the mid-nineteenth century, the collection contains over 16,000 numbered specimens representing more than 3,000 different taxa, all set within 600 acres of beautifully landscaped grounds. Today, the arboretum is owned and cared for by the Forestry Commission (FC) for public benefit. Renowned worldwide for its autumn colour, the arboretum attracts over 350,000 visits per annum, providing a variety of activities to help people engage with trees and their importance, including; events, natural play trails, guided walks, interpretation and an extensive formal education programme. The FC is supported in its work by the Friends of Westonbirt Charity (FOWA).

In recognition of its significance Westonbirt was granted National Arboretum status in 2001 and is registered as a Grade I historic landscape of international importance.

1.1.1 Our Mission

In common with most botanic gardens Westonbirt's Mission and objectives are influenced by a mixture of conservation, learning and community related policies. Through discussion these documents have been distilled into our Mission: '*to connect people with trees to improve the quality of life*'. This Mission is supported by five key objectives;

- To maintain, develop and document the arboretum and its tree collection as a world-class resource for science and learning.
- To provide opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to learn about trees, their cultivation and importance in our lives.
- To maintain and develop the arboretum as a place for healthy, enjoyable and rewarding recreation.
- To conserve the arboretum's distinctive historical landscape and heritage.
- To encourage a wide and diverse community of individuals and organisations to participate in our work.

Underlying all our work are principles of *inclusivity* and *sustainability*.

1.1.2 Our current visitor profile

Westonbirt is situated within the south Cotswolds in Gloucestershire. The majority of our visitors are drawn from the surrounding area within an hour's drive-time. It is largely a rural catchment, albeit with several large urban cities on the periphery including Bristol, Bath, Gloucester and Swindon.

Through visitor surveys by ALVA (Association of Leading Visitor Attractions) we have identified our core audiences as:

- Independent adults over the age of 55; 53% of our visitors are over 55 - this is a higher percentage than for 'heritage' attractions nationally (31%)
- Families with children under ten – 30% of visitors come with children
- Group visits e.g. WI, U3A, gardening clubs; approx. 300 special interest groups visit/year

As well as identifying who our visitors are, these surveys also highlight audiences that are under-represented in Westonbirt's audience profile compared with the catchment area;

- Young adults (16-25yrs)
- Although levels of disadvantage (measured by Indices of Multiple Deprivation) within our catchment are lower compared to the national average, there are pockets of deprivation in the larger urban areas that lie within our catchment area. However in terms of ACORN analysis, 90% of our current visitors are categorised as A, B and C1. This is higher compared with other heritage attractions (82%) and leisure attractions (80%) and is also significantly different from both national averages for the population as a whole and within our catchment.
- Less than 1% of our visitors are from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. This partially reflects our catchment area (Wiltshire; 1.6%, South Gloucestershire; 2.4%, Gloucestershire; 2.8%). But it is not representative of the urban areas within our catchment (e.g. Swindon; 4.8%, Bristol; 9.8%) and is considerably lower than the national average of 10.5%.

In addition to these three audiences, we have also identified older people at risk of exclusion as a priority audience for Westonbirt, as although the site already attracts large numbers of older visitors local council reports highlight a growing risk of social isolation amongst older people living within our catchment area, exacerbated by rural living and disability. The population of older people in the southwest is growing faster than any other age category (SWRDA, 2006), for example Gloucestershire's population of old people is predicted to grow by more than 50% over the next 20 years.

1.2 Why Hidden Voices?

As passionate advocates for trees, we are committed to enabling more people to forge meaningful connections with trees and the environment. **As section 1.1.1 highlights; we will not fulfil our mission if we fail to reach out to all people and engage them in our work.**

As a public sector organisation one of our key roles is to provide opportunities for public involvement / enjoyment and to support local communities. The Natural Environment White Paper (June 2011) states;

'Our ambition is to strengthen the connections between people and nature. We want more people to enjoy the benefits of nature by giving them the freedom to connect with it...'

DEFRA's Diversity Action Plan 'Outdoors for All' (DEFRA 2008) sets targets for

'...broadening social inclusion, focusing on the need to raise awareness of the benefits of the natural environment among under-represented groups and

increasing the number, diversity and frequency of people in these groups enjoying the outdoors.'

As section 1.1.2 clearly demonstrates, there are several audiences that do not visit the arboretum.

There is extensive research on the barriers that prevent different audiences from accessing the environment (English Heritage, 2005; Countryside Access and Activities Network, 2008; Countryside Agency, 2005). Recently Morris *et al* (2011) in their review of the published research concludes that:

'The kinds of barriers affecting social groups ... centre on three key issues: (1) knowledge and awareness of where and how to use woodlands; (2) motivations and enthusiasm to use woodlands and (3) feeling welcome and finding suitable physical access and facilities.

The variation in combinations of barriers that affect different social groups... weakens any argument for a 'one size fits all' approach to bringing about equality of access and strengthens the case for targeted interventions that are tailored to the specific needs of individuals and groups.'

Our limited experience of working with these audiences corroborates these findings. We recognise that a significant challenge to broadening our visitor base is that some communities do not see Westonbirt as a 'place for them'. Combined with the relatively high costs of visiting Westonbirt (in terms of time / finance) and inexperience of staff and volunteers of engaging with these groups, it is perhaps not surprising that previous 'one-off' community activities did not lead to development of the in-depth relationships we had hoped.

1.3 Project Aim and Objectives

The Hidden Voices Project was specifically designed to address the issues identified in section 1.2. By developing regular visits and a collaborative approach to planning / development of activities with the community groups involved we hoped to develop more sustained relationships and give staff / volunteers greater confidence to approach community groups that have needs outside our traditional 'comfort zone'. Funding for transport to reduce the cost of visits was also seen as a fundamental part of the project. Thus the overarching aim of Hidden Voices can be stated as:

'to engage with communities that do not visit Westonbirt currently using a collaborative approach that enables us to develop a shared understanding of trees and what they mean to society.'

From the outset we identified a number of institutional objectives (centred on investigating (a) how we can grow Westonbirt's social role and (b) developing our capacity to deliver it) and learning objectives (focused on the benefits we felt participants would gain from taking part in the project). These are summarised in Table 1 overleaf.

Institutional Objectives	Learning objectives
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learn about developing new collaborative approaches to working with different community groups to create shared responsibility for success 2. Learn about the benefits of multiple visits with a specific group, what can this offer all involved? 3. Deepen staff / volunteer understanding about working with different audiences and increase their recognition of the importance of diversifying our audience base 4. Deepen our relationship with target audiences 5. Fulfil our obligations to deliver government policy 6. Diversify the voices heard on site (see section 1.3.2) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Raise the esteem of participants by providing opportunities for personal reflection that is positively valued as part of our community 2. Enable participants to view Westonbirt as somewhere that is welcoming, inclusive and 'for them' 3. Increase participants' awareness of the role of trees in their lives and how the way they live their lives can make a difference towards a more sustainable future (1.3.1) 4. Increase participant creativity through their experiences at Westonbirt

Table One: Project objectives

1.3.1 The creative legacy

A key objective of our project was to work with each group to develop a tangible creative 'output' that could be shared with other visitors. As well as helping to raise self esteem and share responsibility for the project with participants we hoped this would help ensure the project's ongoing legacy by diversifying the range of voices 'heard' at Westonbirt.

Research into visitor motivations shows that organisations must seek to make their sites relevant to different audiences. Uzzell (1994) states that *'there is no such body as the general public. The so-called general public is made up of different audiences with different needs and different expectations.'* Visitors are not passive but active participants during their visit and *'bring a multiplicity of interpretations to the reading of displays'* Goulding (2000) and as such are increasingly unwilling *'to be passive recipients of wisdom from on high, but want to participate, to question, to take part as equals...'* Black (2005). Reflecting on effective interpretation Sterry (2008) concludes that to be effective in giving meaning to a place and providing a context for pride and ownership, interpretation must *'take into account what visitors themselves bring and their own understanding of a place.'*

By developing and sharing a visible outcome we hope to encourage future visits from these audiences as they perceive that Westonbirt is relevant to them.

1.4 Our community partners; rationale and selection process

Having identified the audiences currently under-represented within our visitor profile, we looked to select different community partners that already work within these audiences as we believed this to be the most effective way of reaching out into the community.

Given the relatively short timescale for preparing our project application we felt that it was prudent to approach groups that we had worked with in the past – although for two of the chosen groups this 'relationship' was based on a single previous visit! This decision was based on the rationale that these prior experiences would mean that group leaders would have some understanding of Westonbirt and its potential to meet their clients' needs. This selection approach

was vindicated during the initial phase of the project when the group leaders for both AU and SMDS expressed concerns about how we would meet their clients' specific needs. In hindsight had we chosen entirely new groups to work with this process of initial discussions about the project would have taken too long and would have increased the risk of project failure due to misunderstandings about the project and/or Westonbirt.

Having identified the groups, initial contact was made during the application phase to outline our proposal and gain their agreement in principle to take part.

1.4.1 Bristol Drugs Project; working with disadvantaged adults

BDP is an independent agency that works with drug users, their relatives and friends and with other professionals to reduce drug and alcohol-related harm by promoting change and maximising peoples' potential. Prior to this project, they had made a couple of visits to Westonbirt to take part in practical conservation tasks. Clients from this group expressed the positive impact a day with us has made with respect to their sense of belonging and self-esteem;

'It was an amazing experience, a wicked day. It gave me a bit of hope that I can be part of the community, be normal. I found I could put my mind to something that let me have a really good time, I was 100% there. The natural high from that day got me through the whole weekend (without using) which I was worried about. Out of all the activities that I have done, including the canoeing, that was the best.' **Jamal**

'I enjoyed myself immensely working with Dave. For me the day was relaxing and beneficial in many ways, I felt that everyone worked really well together in a friendly and natural atmosphere. It's a great activity for recovering addicts to be involved with, so far removed from the chaos and noise of city. It gives people a perspective on life that they may not have had before. It was eye opening.' **Anthony**

1.4.2 Awaz Utaoh; working with communities from different ethnicities

Awaz Utaoh means 'raise your voice'. The organisation works within Bristol's South Asian communities to tackle issues such as victimisation, poverty, poor educational achievement, community segregation / isolation and domestic abuse through the promotion of positive citizenship, confidence building and development of social support networks. Prior to this project the group had visited on one occasion following a BEN (Black Environmental Network) training day. The group expressed an interest in sharing their feelings about the importance of their native trees, as well as engaging in further walks and activities at the arboretum.

1.4.3 Stroud Macular Disease Society; working with older people at risk of exclusion

SMDS provides support and advice to anyone who has lost any degree of central vision through Macular Disease. It has about fifty members over 60 years of age. In particular the group focuses on reducing the isolating effect sight loss can cause through monthly meetings, days out and social networks. As part of this work the group had previously visited Westonbirt, but had not worked with our team directly. As some of the group also have mobility impairments, the leader expressed interest in the opportunity for skill development and craft activities to offer a rich engaging experience for members.

1.5 Selecting environmental themes

One of the Communities in Nature programme objectives was to explore how botanic gardens could engage with different audiences about important environmental issues. Following our initial discussions with each group we selected three themes related to significant environmental issues in relation to trees to explore during our HV project. These are outlined in Table Two.

Group	Environmental Theme	Rationale for choosing theme
BDP	Sustainable woodland / land management including issues related to how we care for our collection	Through our initial discussions and feedback from previous visits the importance of engaging the participants in practical conservation tasks was identified. This provided a clear link to discussions about sustainability and land management.
AU	The importance of trees across the globe and the importance of tree conservation	In our initial discussions with the group leader we identified an interest in seeing trees from around the world and in particular those species native to South Asia. Given this we developed opportunities to explore the global importance of trees and its relationship to tree conservation.
SMDS	Climate change	Identifying a suitable environmental theme for SMDS was very difficult given our very limited relationship. Following initial discussions where several of the group expressed an interest in gardens / gardening we agreed to focus on climate change as our key theme on the grounds that this issue is likely to have a significant impact on how we garden (and live) in the future.

Table Two: Group themes

2. Our Project's journey

This section outlines our collaborative approach to engaging with our three community groups, provides a timeline of our delivery and our project budget.

2.1 Project timeline

In developing our project we set out a clear framework for delivering the Hidden Voices Project based on each group visiting on a monthly basis for six months followed by a final celebration timed to coincide with our renowned autumn colour. Our initial plan broke the project into distinct phases and was based on the principle of sharing responsibility for each session with the participants/group leaders so that each programme was tailored to the specific needs of the group.

March Community visit

Following initial discussions with group leaders, we planned visits to each community venue to explain our project further. This aimed to provide them with the opportunity to get to know us in a familiar (comfortable) environment, discuss any issues/concerns they had prior to their visits and give us the opportunity to explain our project objectives and the kinds of activities we could offer.

April 1st site visit: Taster days

The first sessions for each group were based on the feedback we had been provided with during our initial discussions with the group leaders and on our community visits. During these visits we trialled a range of activities to further gauge participant interests. The visits also helped familiarise participants with Westonbirt and staff / volunteers and allowed us to collect baseline feedback to inform programme development and complete necessary paperwork.

May – Jun Visits 2 & 3: Immersion sessions

These visits were designed to build on the taster days by visiting different areas of the arboretum to build participants' understanding of the identified environmental themes through different activities. Although we had some initial ideas for possible activities (including guided sensory / activity walks, practical conservation sessions, reminiscence, craft / arts, creative writing and story telling) our plan was to enable participants to choose the exact activities to ensure shared ownership.

Jul – Aug Visits 4 & 5: Creative response sessions

Following the immersion sessions, we planned to use visits 4 /5 to focus on development of the creative project for each group. As with the immersion sessions the exact nature of the project would be agreed with the participants for example photography, creative writing, natural art, interpretative trail, poetry.

Sept Visit 6: Individual group celebration and reflection

The last individual group visit was planned as a group celebration and an opportunity to draw together creative output and participant feedback.

Oct Celebration Day

The celebration day was designed to bring all the groups involved together for a celebration of the project and showcase the creative outputs.

A full Gantt chart for our project delivery is in Appendix One.

2.1.1 An evolving project – our collaborative approach

As has already been highlighted a key objective of our project was to explore/develop a more collaborative approach to delivery as opposed to the more traditional didactic approach we utilise with formal one-off education visits. As well as providing team development opportunities, the research (briefly outlined in sections 1.2 and 1.3.2) suggests that this would lead to our chosen audiences feeling more valued and welcome.

In reality we quickly found that a collaborative approach based on discussion and mutual agreement was essential as our initial plans were too rigid to accommodate the different opportunities, constraints and challenges each group presented us with; many of which we had either not fully understood or not foreseen at the planning stage. In particular it became clear that each group had strong individual reasons for taking part in the project and these did not always match up with our initial project objectives. Table Three below outlines some of the major changes we made to our programme for each group and the reasons behind. Specific session plans for each group are provided in Appendix Two.

Group	Issues arising	Changes made to our programme
BDP	Objectives; get away from the 'noise' of the city for recuperation, reintegration of clients back into society by helping them to take part in everyday experiences, raising self esteem and pride, overcoming stereotyping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added creative arts day with BDP leaders sharing lead for activities Added family day for BDP's family unit as the group leaders were keen to share the benefit of Westonbirt more widely within the organisation as well as offering the chance for clients to interact in positive family units Added green wood working day instead of audio training due to personal preferences of group
	Pace of day was slower than expected (as clients took longer to get organised – the group leader explained that this was often the result of the chaotic nature of their lives)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer activities incorporated into each day
	Many clients did not wish to be filmed or photographed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Had to adapt our planned creative output (we had thought about creating short films)
AU	Objectives; sharing social activity within the wider community, getting out for healthy exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More time was allocated to free time and breaks. This meant that we could deliver fewer of our planned activities Last session the group requested the opportunity to explore by themselves (we view this as a significant triumph!) Use of trees particularly as food became a major theme Added family day to enable group to share Westonbirt with their community. Speaking with the group leader we learnt that men were often the decision makers in the community and thus needed to be brought onboard to increase the likelihood of repeat visits
	Weather proved to be a major barrier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needed wet weather activities – often curtailed activities in the arboretum
	Most of the group did not have English as first language; many were illiterate. As the group contained many people who were relatively isolated in the community there was limited understanding of social 'norms'. Many had low confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initially we worked hard to ensure only female staff/volunteers worked with the group – over time this was relaxed More time had to be factored in to each day to allow for translation and time taken to organise group Adaptation of activities and evaluation to remove need for writing/reading

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changed our intended creative output (story telling) to create tree recipe book
	Ramadan fell within the project – this meant that we had no access to the group for over a month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This meant changing our planning process to take into account the lack of contact
SMDS	Objectives; staying involved and connected to the world and in particular visiting places they had always visited, keeping minds active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All sessions were adapted to include a craft activity to fulfil the clients’ desire to learn new skills • Less activities incorporated into each day
	The group had previously been involved in projects advising organisations on how they could improve their sites for visually impaired people. As a result some thought that this was our primary objective for involving them in the project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapted first two sessions to ensure that the group had a clear understanding of our objectives. • Given that the group were keen to advise us on how to improve Westonbirt for visually impaired people we also amended the creative output (audio trail) to incorporate new signage (instead of Braille) to take into account their suggestions
	The age range within the group ranged from 70 – 90+. This led to several distinctive issues; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of confidence trying new things; group members did not like the idea of ‘failing’ • Group members did not like crafts they perceived as ‘childish’ • Group members were not demonstrative about what they wanted • Variety of mobility impairments • Climate change theme of little interest to them as they were <i>‘not going to be affected by it’</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amended creative output (audio trail) to include key descriptive phrases used by the group members rather than full recordings • Amended crafts – use of more high quality ‘adult’ materials, increased preparation to ensure group members were given more support • Climate change theme was made more subtle in favour of a more general gardening theme • Amended routes used
	Weather proved to be a major barrier as group members quickly became cold if it rained	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needed wet weather activities – often curtailed activities in the arboretum

Table Three: Issues arising through the project relating to different groups and the impact these had on our delivery.

2.2 Budget

Table Four shows our initial indicative budget submitted as part of our application and a broad breakdown of the actual spend during Hidden Voices. Some amounts include projected costs as we are still awaiting final invoices for some visits and celebration.

Activity	Indicative budget		Actual budget	
	Amount from award	Match funding Westonbirt	Amount from award	Match funding Westonbirt
Attendance at workshops (travel costs, accommodation, staff time)	£813	£1,113	£1,229	£1,113
Partnership outreach visits (staff time, transport costs) – 2 staff per visit, 5 Visits = BDP x 1, SMDS x 2, AU x 2	-	£204	-	£503
Delivery of project visits – staff time (including preparation) @£150/day	-	£3,750	£800	£4,000
Volunteer hours – 126 hours @ £8.50/hour	-	£1,072	-	£1,819
Entrance cost to arboretum	£2,520	-	£2,520	-
Use of learning centre @ £150/day	-	£2,700	-	£2,850
Transport costs to bring groups to the arboretum	£4,500	-	£3,000	-
Training for participants	£420	-	£180	-
Administration costs (including web site updates, social media etc)	£501	£501	£501	£750
Provision of personal protective equipment and tools	-	£300	-	£89
Media resources (digital cameras, recorders, flip camcorders, audio recorders)	£800	£800	£592	£592
Craft resources	£200	£200	£354	£354
Refreshments	-	£100	-	£168
Seasonal trail	-	£200	-	-
Celebration – food, posters and displays	-	-	£600	-
Staff time for celebration	-	-	-	£450
Total	£9,754	£10,940	£9,776	£12,688

Table Four: Indicative and actual budget

The main difference in the indicative and actual budgets for the project relate to staff costs, as we found through the process that we had significantly underestimated the time required for the project. Other notable differences;

- Increase in workshop attendance costs – this is largely associated with the final workshop in Edinburgh
- Saving in transport costs largely due to accessing more economic community transport scheme in Bristol – this meant we didn't have to rely on solely commercial companies
- Celebration costs –our collaborative approach coupled with inexperience of running community projects meant that we did not assign a cost to the celebration. Thankfully savings in transport costs allowed us to cover this cost through the grant.

3. What did we achieve; results and discussion

This section provides a detailed qualitative analysis of what the HV project delivered in relation to its aims and objectives. Specifically it analyses the success of the project in terms of;

1. Delivering a meaningful experience for participants (3.3)
2. Supporting organisational change in relation to developing its social role (3.4)
3. Providing individual staff / volunteer development that will enable them to better engage with a more diverse audience in future (3.5 / 3.6)

3.1 Outcomes for delivery

Through our project we delivered:

- 21 group visits to 417 participants (approx. 112 individuals as many of the participants came on multiple visits). Visit numbers are broken down in Table Five

Group	Visit number							Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	6	Celebration	
AU	27 (6 children)	37 (7 children)	29	30	50 * (19 children)	34	30 (3 children)	237
BDP	9	9	19	16	38 * (15 children)	9	10 (1 child)	110
SMDS	10	10	9	8	11	11	11	70
								417

Table Five: Visit numbers (* = family days)

- Involved 12 members of staff from all arboretum teams – staff involved and their role in the project is outlined in Appendix Three
- Involved 22 volunteers in the project – approximately 214 hours
- A variety of practical conservation tasks to support Westonbirt’s ongoing care and management including 100m of laurel shelterbelt coppiced, 100m of widened rides
- A variety of creative outputs to share with our visitors through our interpretation. This included 3 creative projects (one with each group) as an ongoing legacy for the project. These were: a new sensory trail and audio description (with SMDS); tree recipe book (with AU); and a photograph exhibition for the autumn (with BDP). See Appendix Four for more detail/transcripts

- A blueprint for future community projects

Through this delivery the Hidden Voices project has had a profound effect on both the participants, Westonbirt staff and volunteers. This impact is detailed in the remainder of this section.

3.1.1 The Celebration

On the 17th October we held the HV celebration, during which we invited all participants to Westonbirt to meet the other groups involved in the project, celebrate their work and raise the profile of the project through local press and internally within the Forestry Commission (we were pleased to have both the Forestry Commission Chair and National Learning Lead for Forestry Commission England). The outline for the day is provided in Appendix Five.

Prior to the day we were a little concerned with how the different groups would interact; but we needn't have worried as the day proved a very successful and moving climax to the project, best illustrated through pictures.



Speech by Pam Warhurst, Forestry Commission Chair



Groups admiring photographic journeys that documented the course of the project. Each group was able to take home the laminated photographs to share in their own communities.

Members of the SDMS group enjoying the photographic exhibition developed by BDP members.



Members of SMDS and AU sharing celebration lunch prepared by AU.

Group taking part in the sensory audio trail.



3.2 Qualitative evaluation; measuring the impact of Hidden Voices

Throughout the project we undertook a variety of different qualitative evaluation methodologies to help us assess project success; these methods are outlined in Appendix Six. Using the 'Inspiring Learning for All' framework developed by the Museums, Libraries and Archive Council we analysed feedback received for evidence that the HV project had a positive impact in terms of both the participants' and staff/volunteers' learning. In particular we used the framework's generic learning outcomes to help define our broad learning outcomes. These were;

1. evidence of increased knowledge/understanding/skills about the environment
2. evidence of the development of positive attitudes, values and behaviours about (1) themselves, (2) Westonbirt and (3) trees and the environment
3. evidence of increased enjoyment, creativity and inspiration

3.3 How was it for them; what did the participants get from the project?

The Hidden Voices project set out to deliver a variety of learning objectives that focused on changing the way that participants felt about themselves, about Westonbirt and about trees and the environment. Specifically the Hidden voices project aimed to:

2. Raise participants' self esteem in terms of what they could achieve
3. Change / develop the participants' perception and feelings towards Westonbirt by forging positive and welcoming links
4. Increase participants' understanding about the importance of trees (in particular with regard to selected environmental themes)

Both individual participants' feedback and that of supporting volunteers indicates that the HV project did deliver against each of these objectives.

3.3.1 Personal impact: did HV help participants to feel more positive about themselves and the environment?

Participants' comments indicate that HV did raise their self esteem. These comments identify two key supporting factors that helped participants' to feel more positive about themselves; (1) the inspirational setting and (2) the learning activities themselves.

'I have gained knowledge, colour and peace of mind' (SMDS)

'I've really enjoyed taking part in the project, getting to try new things and meet new people. The site is uplifting and good for confidence building and to escape from the city' (BDP)

'I have learned new skills, and connected with nature, a spiritual connection' (BDP)

'Holding strong pagan beliefs I cherish nature and the divine energy of life and coming here it is easy to feel filled with inspiration and life enforcing joy! Thank you' (BDP)

'Being part of the project here is more than I could hope for – woodlands and trees are exactly what I want to know about and work with' (BDP)

'I love the trees, each one is different and being out in the fresh air is good' (AU)

'Many of them [AU group] commented on the peace and beauty of the place, implying a great contrast with where they lived. There was certainly a sense that, having been introduced to it in this way, the participants felt much more confident

about engaging with the English countryside.’ **Pauline Thomas, Volunteer working with AU**

‘The size makes me feel small. It puts things into perspective’. **Mel BDP**

‘Its branches go up so strongly. There’s a space at the base I could sit and children could climb - it made me feel safe’. **Sara BDP**

The range of activities and the impact these had on participants’ sense of self was also commented on by several volunteers:

When we were making willow hurdles, one lady created a beautifully crafted example. It turned out that she had learned to weave baskets before she came to England. The leader pointed out that this was someone who counted for little in society – an older woman with no knowledge of English, unable to read or write – but who had this remarkable skill. **Pauline Thomas**

One young man seemed to hide behind a shrub to create his picture, as he appeared rather shy. When I commented on his work, he said he wished his Mum could see it. I think he felt proud of his achievement. **Irene Coleman**

The participants seemed to respond to Westonbirt’s peaceful atmosphere, it opened them up and they started talking. The craft activities encouraged them to reflect on their lives. One gentleman started talking about his own life and what he had done before he lost his sight. He thought he ought to record it – we discussed the audio recorders. I think he has now started to talk with his grandchildren. Another participant was an artist before she went blind – since then she hadn’t done any art. The project gave her the chance to do art and discover that she could still enjoy it. **Jenny Alcock**

Westonbirt gave them a non-censorial space, a full day of occupation and time away from their day to day routines. As several folks remarked, they could spend time not thinking about drugs at all and just enjoy the work. **Peter Landless**

When they were told that it was going to be a creative writing session most of them said “we can’t do that” but they found that once they got started they did and produced some wonderful work. **Sharon Forward**

3.3.2 Sense of belonging: did HV help participants feel welcome at Westonbirt?

Many of the participants’ comments indicate that the HV project has enabled them to make personal connections both to the arboretum and to trees/environment in general.

‘I didn’t know Westonbirt until I had an opportunity to visit through BDP and I absolutely love it, great, great place. To tell you honestly, sometimes when I feel sad or down, this place comes to mind and I feel better; I have gained more serenity, awareness and a sense of belonging’ **Jorge (BDP)**

‘I’ve been really looking forward to this visit – I couldn’t sleep last night I was so excited’ **Olive, (SMDS)**

‘Westonbirt is an overwhelming experience where ½ an acre is so much to take in and the whole 600 acres too big for any head!’ **(BDP)**

'I've seen more trees, trees from my dreams that have now come true. Some of them I've seen back home; they are the trees from my dreams. And when I see a tree I like I want to share it with my children' **(AU participant)**

'I have a very strong interest in nature, however trees and plants haven't (ridiculously it seems to me now) been given enough attention or credit on my part. As such my time spent at Westonbirt is beyond doubt amongst the top few percent on a scale of time spent anywhere this year!' **Sam (BDP)**

'Basically I could not spend too much time at Westonbirt in my opinion. Of course this is not realistic though if I had the opportunities I would love to spend a significant amount of time there; I have felt at home no matter what I've been involved in doing during my time there' **Sam (BDP)**

'These trees are our family, I have a bond with them, I talk to them, I can feel them' **(AU participant)**

'One of the my memorable impressions; When we were having a feedback session on the family day [AU group]; one teenage lad said that he had never really looked at trees before, and had just taken them for granted, but that he had learned a lot about them.' **Pauline Thomas, volunteer**

It was particularly striking to see the gradual change in attitude of participants over the programme of visits. For example during their first visit many of the ladies from AU indicated that they had never previously visited or indeed heard of Westonbirt. Many were nervous about being in the woodland, and how they would fit in. The attitude of this group changed from 'We've seen enough trees now' on their first visit, to 'We want to spend more time with the trees' by the middle of the project. For the last visit they asked to have free time to explore by themselves without Westonbirt staff.

Initially, this nervousness was also evident within the SMDS. In particular the group had difficulty in recognising the benefit of exploring the same trails on multiple visits. However, through our collaborative approach we gradually overcame this concern; asked midway through the project about the next session's activities the group leader commented that *'it doesn't matter, whatever you do, the group will enjoy it.'*

For all groups it was clear that the welcome by staff and volunteers was very important in helping the participants' feel welcome and that they were amongst friends.

'Most of all I have enjoyed taking part and feeling part of the show' **Chris (SMDS)**

'Most of all I have enjoyed working with the volunteers who were all friendly and welcoming' **Mike (BDP)**

'It has opened the place up as a broader 'community' resource rather than seeing it as selective or privileged activity to people with the money or their own transport' **Pete (BDP leader)**

'We of the Stroud Macular Disease Society consider you as our friends now. We thank you all so much for the care you have taken with us all, the wonderful walks amongst the trees.' **Helen (SMDS)**

3.3.3 Environmental themes: did HV deepen participants' understanding?

Table Six below outlines before and after feedback from participants in relation to their group environmental theme.

Group	Environmental Theme	Understanding about theme prior to HV	Evidence of knowledge about theme after taking part in HV
BDP	Sustainable woodland management	<p>People manage woodlands to... <i>'Ensure they're kept in good order'</i> Mike <i>'Help the trees grow better, bigger, so that it looks pretty'</i> <i>'Conserve species, allow diversity and get the most out of the piece of land'</i> Tina</p>	<p><i>'It is all our responsibility as it is all our future. I think woodland management should be part of a community engagement project for everybody'</i></p> <p><i>I think sustainable woodland management is important for the future of mankind as we need to juggle human habitat with the natural environment'</i> Mike</p> <p><i>'I think in order to preserve the woodland we need projects like this. People have destroyed so much of our planet that seeing such thoughtful care being used is inspiring'</i> Tina</p>
AU	The importance of trees across the globe and the importance of tree conservation	<p>We made the decision not to ask this question as the time taken to discuss / translate the first two concepts significantly overran its allocated time. We felt that to ask this question would have compromised the 1st visit by not enabling time for taster activities and exploration.</p>	<p><i>'We need to look after trees like a child – plant the seed, grow leaves and then grow and grow like a small child. We look after them, care for them and they grow nicely and when they are grown they give us something. They give us oxygen to breathe for our health, we can use them for nature, make paper, food, fire wood, houses and decoration.'</i></p> <p><i>'Leaves, branches, seeds, wood, everything we can use from the trees. Different kinds of materials can come from trees, and nuts and food.'</i></p> <p><i>'Trees are really, really important. They give us freshness and help when you're stressed out. They give enjoyment and shade in hot weather. There is beauty in the trees. They are peaceful'</i></p>
SMDS	Climate change	<p><i>'I know it is very important to life on earth to continue'</i> <i>'Climate change effects the whole world and in some cases affects the food chain e.g. fruit trees'</i> <i>'Nothing changes! Seasons change and everything changes because of that'</i></p>	<p><i>'The trees don't know if they are coming or going. Certain things will adapt [to the changing climate], others will love the changes but others will struggle'</i> Mona</p> <p><i>'This is a difficult one – we don't know where climate change will lead ... It is essential for trees to be replaced when they are cut down, we have to keep our countryside.'</i> Helen</p>

Table Six: Evidence of understanding in relation to the environmental themes

Assessing whether the participants' understanding of environmental issues had increased as a result of taking part in HV proved particularly difficult for the AU and SMDS groups due to the challenge of collecting baseline evaluation from AU and SMDS at the start of the project as our

evaluation methodology (concept mapping) did not take into account the specific needs of the participants. However, the feedback does suggest that participants from both BDP and AU groups did develop greater understanding of their particular environmental themes; although the evidence is less strong for AU.

- In particular the BDP group demonstrated an increase in understanding both in terms of their depth of knowledge (for example in the use of specific terminology and appreciation of the need to balance decisions) and how they felt they were personally part of the issue. This greater understanding and appreciation may be the result of differences in their programme content compared with the programmes of AU/SMDS; they were the only group that took an active part in practical conservation tasks, other groups simply heard about our work. This supports the old adage '*Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand.*'
- The AU group comments clearly demonstrate understanding of the role trees play in society and in at least one comment the need for us to care for them. However the comments lack detail about specific conservation or their role in supporting it.

From the comments received it impossible to assess whether HV led to SMDS participants' increasing their understanding/appreciation of climate change. However, from our interactions with the group we feel that this is unlikely. Through the course of our sessions it became clear that the 'fit' of our selected theme with the interests of the participants was poor; put simply the SMDS participants were not interested in climate change as they felt that it had little personal relevance to them (because it wasn't going to impact them). However, although on the one hand this is a project failure it did lead to significant team reflection on collaborative working with different audiences and the need for fuller discussions during the project initiation phase, which resulted in a better understanding of how we can overcome this issue in future.

3.3.4 The creative legacy: did HV create a creative legacy?

Appendix Four contains examples of the creative outputs for each group. The creative elements of the programmes were definitely enjoyed and we had many comments during the activities about their interest and involvement. Indeed, for some the creative aspects of the HV project were the highlight – for example a member of AU group who works with the Asian youth project has used all of the craft activities she learnt during the HV project with her group in Bristol.

'Taking part has been fantastic. I've been amazed with the willow weaving and have been able to teach it to St Dunstan's group in Wales (Blind Veterans UK) so that they can do it in their craft workshop' **Ken (SMDS)**

'Because we don't speak English and we dress as we do, people often think we can't do anything – but look at what this lady has done' **Simi, (AU Group Leader)**

'The bird boxes will be a constant reminder of our time at Westonbirt' **Helen (SMDS)**

'I most enjoyed the journey sticks and doing bits of written work outside surrounded by natural beauty. Making the sculptures was cool too, in fact so was the spoon making – OK I loved all of it!' **Tina (BDP)**

They participated fully and with great enthusiasm in collecting natural art materials such as leaves, petals, twigs, seeds etc. I wondered if they might find this a childish task, but they collected and filled their plastic bags without

hesitation. Again they appeared to enjoy learning and chatting. When they settled down to create their natural art picture, they participated with concentration and showed real flare, making wonderful pictures. Irene Coleman, volunteer

Feedback highlighted that all groups liked to have a 'take home' element to each visit. Not only was this something to remember their visit by it also enabled them to share their experience with others. Picking the right level of craft activity that gave the right level of challenge (in particular did not seem childish), while at the same time enabling all participants to achieve success was important; as was using high quality resources.

It is interesting to note that despite all the feedback received and outlined in the preceding sections, we received no comments at all with regard to the three specific creative legacy projects (i.e. creation of the audio/sensory trail, photography exhibition (BDP) and recipe book (AU)). Indeed delivery of these specific elements relied heavily on staff and volunteers to put together, for example

- We recorded the audio trail using feedback from SMDS participants; our original plan was for the participants to record the trail themselves using digital recorders, however in reality we found that their level of description when put on the spot was less creative than when talking spontaneously out in the collection
- Volunteers helped to put together the photography exhibition as we did not have time for the participants to do it. We also struggled to get comments for all pictures back from participants
- We had to change our planned original creative output for the AU group (stories) as the language barrier and limited literacy made this impossible within the timescales of the project. This said tree foods seemed to be very popular with the group and given the importance of food sharing we felt that a recipe book was a more achievable goal. This finished recipe book and the food at the celebration were a huge success.

As such it is questionable that we can claim that the HV project was fully successful with respect to this particular objective as it evidently failed to *fully* engage the participants. This clearly demonstrates that careful consideration must be given to how we develop collaborative creative outputs in future projects; we need to understand the audience better before deciding on an output (better still involve them in deciding what it might be) and make this aspect much more explicit in the programme; such emphasis may encourage the participants to engage more and take greater ownership. In hindsight six visits, despite seeming a lot at the start of the project, was perhaps too few to fully develop this aspect alongside the immersion activities planned.

3.4 What did we learn as an organisation?

In addition to our learning objectives the Hidden Voices project aimed to deliver ambitious organisational objectives centred on developing our perception of our social role and our capacity to deliver. Specifically the Hidden Voices project aimed to challenge staff and volunteers to think about the purpose of Westonbirt and how it can deliver to everyone.

We received written feedback from 7 members of staff, including responses from all members of the Westonbirt management team and two staff (Cheryl Pearson and Gina Mills) who supported delivery of the HV project. From the responses received it is clear that Westonbirt staff perceive the HV project as a success, although the project has also raised a number of issues for us to consider in future projects.

3.4.1 The impact of HV on wider staff perception of Westonbirt's social role

It is clear that the project has had a positive effect on staff perception of Westonbirt's social role. The impact of HV on staff perceptions was greatest on those staff that had been practically involved in its delivery (as you would expect). Comments from these staff tended to be more detailed and specific. Responses seemed to fit into three distinct categories;

1. For some it confirmed what they already felt; as such the HV project provided positive affirmation of 'a way forward'

'I already saw Westonbirt as having huge potential to involve a much wider section of the community; this project has proved it is possible. Its success paves the way for future development... in breaking down perceived barriers.' **Cheryl Pearson**

2. For others it confirmed that Westonbirt has a social role to play and that this should inform our ongoing work

'Seeing the Asian women's group Awaz Utaoh get so much from their experiences at the arboretum convinces me that engaging hard-to-reach groups should be central to what we do in future... I believe that the Hidden Voices project will provide a strong foundation of experience which will inform our approach to this kind of work in the future.' **Gina Mills**

'Hidden Voices has confirmed in my mind the potential role for the arboretum in providing a distinctive 'service' for the kinds of groups involved...' **Simon Toomer**

'We gained a real insight into the motivations and objectives of our partner organisations and how we could use these to develop ourselves.' **Simon Hough**

'When carrying out changes on the site thought will need to be given to how we connect to these groups.' **Paul Cody**

3. For senior managers the HV project was also seen as an agent for change as it challenged traditional views

'I think it has challenged our perceptions of ourselves (The Arboretum) and how really inclusive we are. It has also made us aware that other visitor groups (and perhaps even members of staff) retain an exclusive attitude to the arboretum. They are more comfortable with our traditional visitor profile and do not always embrace a wider social role or visitor profile.' **Simon Toomer**

'[The HV project] has made me realise that Westonbirt has a lot to offer to members of society that are under represented in our usual visitor demographic. It has helped to show other site users and partners (inc friends) that these sections of society can get a great deal from Westonbirt. It has exposed staff and friends to sectors of society that they may not have been aware of and their needs.' **Paul Cody – Head of Visitor Attractions**

The ongoing need to challenge attitudes was (unfortunately) highlighted during the course of the project when several visitors and even a small minority of volunteers were overheard making disparaging remarks about some of the groups participating. It was however gratifying to hear and see other staff and volunteers actively challenging these individuals.

3.4.2 Why was HV successful – the benefits of multiple visits

Most respondents felt that the HV project had made a significant contribution to staff/volunteer development. Much of the success was put down to the extended delivery timeframe and multiple visits. Staff responses identify (1) benefits of our approach for participants and (2) benefits for the staff involved; see table seven.

Benefits to staff and volunteers	Benefits to participants
<p><i>'I think the value of the extended time scale is that it allows scope for... development of attitudes... It also allows time for trial, error and adaptation.'</i> Simon Toomer</p> <p><i>'I think it has taken some people outside their comfort zone in terms of their typical user-group contacts and made them realise that the arboretum cannot be complacent about its role. It has therefore been a means by which staff have adapted their approach to accommodate a different perception by the users they have worked with.'</i> Simon Toomer</p> <p><i>'Staff have been able to gauge and adapt the programme to suit the style/needs/perceptions of each group and therefore gain more pleasure from their interaction and get a buzz out of how much the groups have enjoyed their involvement. Staff have gained hands-on development that has really opened up their perception of what's possible, and given them an insight in to what works best for the group which may differ considerably from what they may have planned would work.'</i> Cheryl Pearson</p> <p><i>[The value of HV has been in] bringing our staff into closer more meaningful contact with groups under represented in our core visitors. It has helped us understand what those barriers, both physical and cultural are to such visitors coming here more often.</i> Simon Hough</p>	<p><i>'The fact that the groups made multiple visits was really important. The groups grew in confidence and had a greater sense of ownership of the visits by the end of the project. In the case of Awaz Utaoh, this meant that from very tentative early visits, they grew in confidence to the point where they wanted to self-lead some of their own time in the arboretum... I was lucky enough to be present when Caroline was recording the thoughts that Awaz Utaoh had about trees on their final visit. One of the participants was able to talk at length about the importance of trees for building materials, clothing, etc, but also about how "trees are like children, and if you nurture them they will care for you in your old age". I'm not sure you'd get this level of thought on a single visit.'</i> Gina Mills</p> <p><i>'The extended time has enabled participants to build up a rapport and see the benefits of visiting Westonbirt far more than a one off visit would allow. The groups have relaxed into the project and given more of themselves over the weeks and been able to absorb more from the arboretum too'</i> Cheryl Pearson.</p> <p><i>'I think the value of the extended time scale is that it allows scope for change in appreciation and confidence... and development of attitudes...'</i> Simon Toomer</p> <p><i>'The extended time has enabled participants to build up a rapport and see the benefits of visiting Westonbirt far more than a one off visit would allow.'</i> Simon Hough</p>

Table Seven: Benefits of approach to staff and participants

Unsurprisingly, respondents believed that the greatest developmental impact had been on the learning team and volunteers directly involved in the delivery of the project. However several also indicated how the HV project had impacted on them individually:

'... as designated photographer for some of the Awaz Utaoh visits, being a small part of the project has been a real privilege. It has helped me grow in confidence - I now feel almost as comfortable taking pictures of people as I do trees, for one thing. I have learnt that it is entirely possible to communicate and have fun despite language barriers and cultural differences.' **Gina Mills**

'This has really helped interpret the collection here and its significance to other peoples' lives in ways I simply hadn't thought about before. This will be helpful and will be used as we plan and develop new facilities and activities here... Staff across the disciplines have been involved - Recreation, Marketing, Director and Learning. We have used... experience gained in the initial meeting [at Kew] to develop how we want to promote our own Mission Statement and to engage all the staff in the development of this. We have moved this in positive directions which we would not have done had it not been for the Hidden Voices project.'
Simon Hough

However, several staff felt that the benefits of the project could have been greater if more staff had been involved:

'The key members of staff that have been directly involved have definitely benefited from this project. Others may have gained knowledge and I would have liked to have seen more staff directly involved with some of the project.' **Paul Cody**

'My own experience could have been improved if I was able to dedicate more time to the project, perhaps attending every visit that the group made so that I was more familiar with the participants.' **Gina Mills**

'My team have not had enough contact with the groups to allow any meaningful development.' **Mark Ballard**

This highlights the ongoing importance of engaging wider teams in community-based projects where the HV project could have gone further.

3.4.3 Areas for improvement / further work

Respondents also identified specific areas where further work was required if we are to fully realise Westonbirt's social potential: This included:

- Access to Westonbirt – how can we get people to Westonbirt

Access has (as always) been identified as a barrier to groups such as these and I think our experience may help focus attention of diversifying transport opportunities and possible provision of subsidised means of access.' **Simon Toomer**

- Marketing to specific communities and developing our offer

We're going to have to find creative ways of engaging with these new audiences, both on the ground at the arboretum and in our communications with the outside world.' **Gina Mills**

- Further staff / visitor development

It has made us aware that other visitor groups (and perhaps even members of staff) retain an exclusive attitude to the arboretum. They are more comfortable with our traditional visitor profile and do not always embrace a wider social role or visitor profile... **Simon Toomer**

'I would need more rigorous training to build my confidence before undertaking guiding for some disabilities.' **Val Taylor, volunteer guide**

3.4.4 Challenges for the future

Despite the overwhelming view that the HV project had been successful and had demonstrated a useful model for future projects, all managers recognised that the level of resources/staff time required for this type of project could be a stumbling block for future projects.

'My concern is about how we continue this kind of work and build on what we have done so far without funding... how do we ensure that it is affordable for those that want to visit? How do we make sure they can reach us? Public transport could be a real barrier to people attempting to make independent visits to us.' **Gina Mills**

'The work load on staff that have to accommodate this work into existing job plans can and I think has been stressful.' **Simon Toomer**

We continue to have challenges about resources verses our aspirations to deliver more to a wider audience. The Hidden Voices project has certainly helped us see ways of delivering and enabled us to take part in it, but how we continue to resource these activities in future is still a concern I think. **Simon Hough**

Several managers also commented on the need for future projects to demonstrate a clear 'fit' with both the arboretum and its remit. They concluded that the key is to ensure that clear cost/benefit analysis and ensuring that projects remain collection focused are vitally important.

An effective evaluation should consider the benefits [delivery against mission etc] vs. the true cost. A lot has been learnt by those involved in the project, & now these experiences can allow us to make better informed decisions in the future. **Mark Ballard**

I think there is always a danger (I hope and think it has been avoided) of forgetting that the added value from using the arboretum and staff must derive from the tree collection and landscape. We must continuously question that fundamental point [of projects] otherwise we may as well run these projects on a playing field or in a church hall. **Simon Toomer**

3.5 Learning team development

The Learning and Participation team had primary responsibility for delivering the HV project. From the outset developing this team's capacity and confidence to deliver to a more diverse audience was a key project objective. Specifically the HV project aimed to provide staff with

- Greater understanding about delivering a multiple visit programme (instead of our usual 'one-off' visits)
- Experience of developing a collaborative approach with groups, sharing responsibility for outcomes and sessions (as opposed to our more traditional teaching approach)
- The opportunity to develop their understanding of working with new audiences
- Forge stronger links with the wider community to diversify the voices heard at Westonbirt

Throughout the project, learning team members were asked to keep individual journals to record both the sessions and in particular their individual learning.

3.5.1 A juggling act; developing project management skills

Although developing project management skills was not an explicit objective for HV, we soon realised that working with multiple groups over multiple sessions was a greater logistical challenge than we had initially foreseen. Juggling visits with each group simultaneously involved the whole team; this required a more thorough and transparent plan than with our standard one-off visits where one member of staff alone is responsible for the group. The BGCi session and our subsequent application of the project management processes outlined proved invaluable in delivering our programme.

'This has been a steep learning curve – I have learned about project management strategies and techniques that have helped me to create clear pathways, visual representations of progression, and to gain an overview of the roles, tasks and timeline of nine different members of staff. It has helped me to see who can help support each aspect, when best to ask for that support, and to recognise gaps in my planning. I no longer need to try and hold all of this in my head!' **Chris Meakin**

3.5.2 The collaborative approach; developing confidence working with new audiences

Unlike one-off visits, where groups pick a programme 'off the shelf' HV set out to trial a collaborative approach as recommended by Morris *et al* (2011). This challenged our traditional modus operandi and provided a rich learning experience for the team. The evolving process made us relinquish a level of control; a nerve-wracking step as it meant that we had to think 'on our feet' and guide groups as opposed to lead them. From the feedback outlined above it is clear that the success of the HV project stems from this collaborative approach as it enabled us to listen effectively to the groups and adapt (see 2.1.1).

We found that sharing responsibility, both with group leaders and participants allowed us to ensure our activities fit with their specific needs:

'Throughout the walk I challenged the group to find 9 spring flowers as Simi had explained that the group would benefit from a scavenger hunt type activity to keep them occupied as she felt many had short attention spans. This gave a focus to walking between information stops and meant some ladies examined the flowers very closely'

Willow was preferred by the ladies because they could take their creations home that day. Most made paper, but leaving it behind to dry meant that there was not so much enthusiasm. This may have implications for detailed crafts that take

more than one visit to complete. May need to have different length activities to cater for this, or small examples to take home and communal pieces to work on.'

Second visit staff diary (AU group); *A feeling from group members was that they had done the walk now and that the remaining visits should be inside! I believe this is due to lack of knowledge about what else the site had to offer. When mentioning that we could base our story telling activities out amongst the trees, Simi was very interested. Many of the ladies were interested in more crafts and if these are linked carefully to uses of trees, I think we can extend this environmental focus.*

Talking with a couple of the young translators about the feasibility of taking the group on a trailer ride around Silk Wood, they were very enthusiastic about this and thought it would be of great interest to the group. Considering how little walking the group does and the limited route we took today, I can see no other way to show Silk Wood to this group.'

Indeed staff noted that problems occurred when the groups were not involved in decision making:

'The participants chose which activity they wanted to do first in the morning. Consequently those on the activity walk in the afternoon did not see it as of particular interest and because they had really enjoyed the morning activity they wanted to continue with it.' **(Staff visit diary, BDP)**

At times it is important to stand back and let the group leader manage part of the day. As gatekeepers for their organisation, they may be the best person to communicate aspects of the programme to the participants. For example, Simi, the leader of Awaz Utaoh, often stepped forwards to explain the programme / activity instructions, or to gather the ladies together to ask them to listen quietly. They are used to her leading them in this way and responded to her more quickly than if we had taken our usual gentle approach. The sessions ran more smoothly once we realised we needed to share the delivery with Simi in such a way.

Most of our previous programmes of activities have been structured, and delivered with faster pace. It was a surprise to realise how relaxed the groups wanted to take the sessions. Initially we planned a full programme, with us working with groups for the whole visit, often with a choice of activities. Reducing our programme activities from this felt like we were providing less of a service to the groups, but through the collaborative approach we came to understand the importance of giving time for social sharing – indeed often the best discussions happened during this informal time.

There was a much stronger need to be flexible as the numbers/composition of the group impacted on what, when and how we could deliver. In particular we quickly discovered that inclement weather (no matter how slight) was a significant psychological barrier to both AU / SMDS:

It began to very lightly spot with rain towards the end of the crafts and it was clear that this was a problem for quite a few of the group, to the extent that although they had walked further than normal during their visit, they did not want to wait for the coach at the pick up point and get wet, but walk even further to the coach park. This was of great surprise to Simi, who was worried about the distance I was taking them. Their clothing definitely was not suitable for

changeable weather and we would have had to spend the day inside if the forecast heavy rain had materialised!

Throughout the project we often found that what we had considered to be the main 'issue' in relation to a particular group's needs at the start of the programme, actually proved to be a minor concern during delivery. This is perhaps best illustrated with SMDS. In her initial diary entry Chris wrote:

'I am nervous about working with the Stroud Macular Disease Group. I have no previous experience of meeting or working with those who are visually impaired, and I do not know what to expect or what experiences we can ask the group to take part in.'

In contrast at the end of the project:

'It has been a great positive and learning experience and I have gained in confidence throughout. As the project progressed and I discovered more and more about the individuals in the group, their needs and interests, I was able to adapt and build the programme of activities to take them further than I had imagined' **Chris Meakin**

In reality the level of visual impairment varied significantly and the participants had all developed coping mechanisms for handling their particular level of disability (after all they lived with it every day). A far greater challenge was working with some of the specific issues that arose due to their age; for example limited mobility, the impact of inclement weather and the difficulty in getting participants' feedback. The main lesson the team learnt throughout the process was that a flexible, progressive and collaborative programme, though daunting initially, was ultimately rewarding both for the users and for staff personally.

3.6 Volunteer development

We quickly learnt that volunteer support was crucial in enabling us to lead such a full programme of activities and for the participants to have someone they recognised, that they could chat to whilst staff were busy with leading, organising and managing the sessions. Indeed the need to involve volunteers more directly in leading delivery, rather than simply supporting was a key learning point for the team:

3rd staff visit diary: *'Make sure the volunteer team have had plenty of time to practice the craft themselves as I am aware that they did not always have confidence about what they were doing; greater confidence that they can demonstrate will enable them to lead more effectively.'*

Even more important in terms of developing Westonbirt's social role in future is the profound effect HV has had on the volunteers themselves. Written feedback from 12 of the volunteers involved (including two collective responses from volunteer couples) is summarised in Table Eight.

Perhaps the greatest impact was on those volunteers who had worked with the BDP group. The shared endeavour of the practical task seemed to create a bond between the volunteers and participants that led to significant change in perceptions.

Impact of HV	Comments by volunteers
<p>Positive change in attitude towards different audiences</p>	<p><i>How were my own perceptions altered? I think I was surprised by the energy and vitality of many of the women, and by the gusto with which they tackled the activities!</i> Pauline Thomas, Volunteer with AU</p> <p><i>Prior to the project the only experience I had of drug addicts was through the mass media. It is now clear to me how narrow and stereotyped this view was. Having now worked with them for 5 or 6 days, I realise that they are just like the rest of us. What really struck me was how willing they were to talk about their stories. It takes a huge amount of courage to talk to complete strangers about something so personal, and it becomes easy to see how they felt that the use of substances was the only way of escaping their situation. The project has given me a much better understanding of those dependant on substances, and how everyday situations for us, become major hurdles for them. It has opened my eyes to a section of society that I'd deliberately avoided beforehand.</i> Graham Ansty, Volunteer with BDP</p> <p><i>Our guests felt more in control when visiting the arboretum than I realised. Our guests from the Macular Disease society helped me see what was wanted when they are walking around the arboretum.</i> Carol Tipper, volunteer with SMDS</p> <p><i>I found I was surprised at the level of concentration and satisfaction they appeared to gain from the task.</i> Irene Coleman, volunteer with BDP</p> <p><i>It is nice to feel we were able to help and share our enjoyment of Westonbirt with others. Particularly with a group who are trying to help themselves get over their often quite serious problems. It made us appreciate how easy it could be to get into drugs and certainly made us a bit more sympathetic to those with such problems.</i> John and Norma Stevens, volunteers with BDP</p> <p><i>The whole experience of working with people with drug problems blew away all my pre-conceptions. After a life coloured by negative reports of the damage done by drugs it was genuinely enlightening to see that the people we were working with were taking very positive steps to come off drugs. More surprising to me was the range of people we met and how lively, interesting and intelligent they were. Meeting them made me broaden my mind and take a less simplistic view of drug addiction.</i> Peter Landless, volunteer with BDP</p> <p><i>I had experience before becoming involved with this project of people who have had problems with alcohol or substance abuse but from where they were in total abstinence so to be able to speak to people who were managing there intake was interesting to me. They all wanted to come off the alcohol/drugs and they were all highly motivated.</i> Sharon Forward, volunteer with BDP</p>
<p>Change in their perception of Westonbirt as a result of taking part</p>	<p><i>Their presence reminded me that the beautiful scenery and natural diversity which most Westonbirt 'regulars' take for granted are not daily experiences for many city-dwellers, particularly those who are socially and economically disadvantaged.</i> Pauline Thomas, volunteer with AU</p> <p><i>Working with the Hidden Voices groups demonstrates in a very obvious way that forests are for everyone, regardless of social or ethnic background, or disability. It also clearly demonstrates that Learning isn't just about formal education.</i> Graham Ansty, volunteer with BDP</p> <p><i>Some of the metaphor – 'arthritic rhododendrons', 'plastic bamboo' etc appealed to me. Evidently people with poor eyesight 'see' different things!</i> Val Taylor, guide volunteer with SMDS</p>
<p>Increased enjoyment of their volunteering</p>	<p><i>I'm really looking forward to the final session, although I'm very sad that it is the end of the project, as I feel that it has been a great success and enormous fun. In fact, one of the major benefits, both to the 'clients' and to the volunteers, has been the sheer amount of fun and laughter generated by the experience.</i> Pauline Thomas, volunteer with AU</p> <p><i>I loved the fact that when I met one of them away from Westonbirt I was treated like a good friend.</i> Carol Tipper, volunteer with SMDS</p> <p><i>I enjoyed talking to them about what they were collecting and pointing things they may not have observed. From my point of view, I found it a memorable, enlightening and learning experience.</i> Irene Coleman, volunteer with BDP</p> <p><i>There was another occasion when we were sitting outside The Maples having lunch (on a non BDP Day) when we were approached and thanked by a lad who had been with us on one of the BDP visits. Such unasked for happenings are very much appreciated and perhaps make us feel it is all really worth while.</i> John and Norma Stevens, volunteers with BDP</p>

	<p><i>Working among the trees at Westonbirt is always a pleasure but the involvement of the Hidden Voices Project provided an added dimension because we were sharing our love of the trees and the environment with people who may not normally come to Westonbirt, and it was always clear that they were taking a palpable pleasure in being there. Peter Landless, volunteer with BDP</i></p> <p><i>It enabled me to meet a whole new lot of people – both with the people who came from the Bristol Drugs Project but also with other Volunteers who I hadn't been in contact with before. Sharon Forward, volunteer with BDP</i></p> <p><i>One of the things I learnt from the group was that despite their obvious skill at the various activities, it was their self-confidence that was the biggest obstacle. Finding ways of boosting that self-confidence through constructive comments and getting them to help their peers was both challenging and rewarding. Graham Antsy</i></p>
<p>Increased confidence in working with different audiences</p>	<p><i>Initially, I was a little worried, as I had never worked with recovering drug adults before and wondered how I would feel about the day. I found that although I was apprehensive, I really enjoyed the day. I personally benefitted from the experience, as it made me realise that although many of the participants had had very difficult lives which is outside my experience, they appeared to really enjoy the opportunity to be in the Westonbirt... Irene Coleman, volunteer with BDP</i></p> <p><i>Before we met up for the first time we did begin to wonder what we had let ourselves in for - we need not have worried, none of them caused any problems and were all quite willing to talk and explain how they had got into drugs in the first place and its effect on their lives. They all enjoyed their visits and had fun as well. Generally it produced a jolly good feeling at the end of a day with the group (BDP). John and Norma Stevens, volunteers with BDP</i></p> <p><i>It did change my perceptions - I have very little experience of disability of any kind - (this particular group could actually see quite a lot) – and conclude we're all just individuals. Val Taylor, guide volunteer working with SMDS</i></p>
<p>Change in behaviour as a result of the HV project</p>	<p><i>I have mentioned the project a couple of times when giving external talks, and it has generated a positive response. Graham Ansty, volunteer with BDP</i></p> <p><i>I took a look at the Bristol Drugs Project website and may at some time in the future consider applying to volunteer with them. Sharon Forward, volunteer with BDP</i></p>

Table Eight: Volunteer Comments highlighting how the HV project has impacted on those volunteers that have taken part

Discussions with the volunteers involved have indicated that they have become strong advocates for social projects with other volunteers and Friends members; given the importance of changing on-site attitudes (by staff, volunteers and visitors) reflected in the comments by our Director this outcome is particularly satisfying.

3.7 Challenges

3.7.1 Challenges communicating with group leaders

Throughout the project we experienced challenges communicating with group leaders, exacerbated in part by the nature of their work (two were part time; one was frequently out of the office). However we also identified specific challenges outlined below.

3.7.1.1 Limited initial discussions

Despite our best efforts, the short time frame between the application process and delivery phase meant that it was difficult to iron out all the details prior to commencement – this led to some communication challenges. An example of how this limited dialogue impacted on the success of the HV project, was with regard to our environmental themes. Although these were discussed with the group leaders prior to the project starting, it became evident during the project that we had not selected the most appropriate topic for SMDS as many of the SMDS participants did not have much interest in the issue of climate change as they were not going to be affected by it. As such it was highly unlikely that we were ever going to be successful in exploring this theme. Knowing the group better as a result of this project, the environmental issue regarding global trees, their importance to people and the need to conserve biodiversity would have been more appropriate as it would have provided opportunities for them to share their experiences and connections, and as a result would have encouraged them to become more personally involved in the issue.

3.7.1.2 Group leader perceptions

We relied on the group leaders to be our communication link with their group members, particularly between visits. As such they were essential in ensuring the huge success of the HV project; put simply we couldn't have done it without them.

However, on occasion we did find that their perceptions influenced the direction of the project, for example about what their group would like to do (or were capable of). Initially this led to some challenges in promoting the project to participants as this was reliant on the leaders support. However, this challenge also proved a valuable learning experience as it allowed us to reflect on the importance of recognising the pivotal role/needs of individual group leaders (alongside those of the participants). Further it highlighted the importance of multiple visits; it was noticeable that over the course of the project the leaders 'relaxed' as they realised that their participants' were benefiting from the project. This in turn led them to become even more enthusiastic supporters of the project.

3.7.1.3 Communicating with organisation staff other than group leaders

BDP were keen to open up and lead sessions for other groups they work with such as the arts group and family unit. While this was great to have them so committed it proved quite challenging as it was not possible to contact them or meet with them to ensure the programme of activities was appropriate to both partners or timetabled effectively. Consequently we weren't always sure what they were planning and how it would work with our programme. This meant us having a degree of flexibility and ensuring there were extra staff available to provide support as required.

At times the last minute nature of communication with group leaders resulted in us adapting/changing the activities on the day in response to numbers, mobility needs, new participants or additional groups of senior management/community leaders attending.

3.7.2 Setting the right objectives

With so many project objectives it was difficult to know where to place our focus / priority and at an early stage we recognised that we would not be able to focus on all of them. As has already

been highlighted we decided on a user-focused approach – but this decision did mean that certain objectives became less important. This was an uncomfortable process; as the Director's comments highlight it challenged us to accept that certain issues that we have always considered fundamental to what we do (for example the core role of delivering environmental messages) should take the back seat. On reflection more realistic expectations for a relatively short project would have reduced this.

However, this said, having to face this challenge made the team question Westonbirt's social role and what issues are important in delivering it. Through the course of the HV project our collaborative approach led to several changes in the programme content that resulted in less focus on the specific themes (for example both AU and BDP wanted to include a family day which led to changes in activities). This approach led the team to consider whether it was more important to get across an environmental message or give participants an experience that would make them feel valued and welcomed, with the hope that they may make future visits where they could be given environmental messages.

3.7.3 'Knowing' our audience

It took several visits to really begin to know our audiences and with hindsight, it would have been beneficial to have made more visits to meet not just the group leaders but the participants before the project began. However, it is only in working with the group that some of their needs, characteristics and interests become apparent. The collaborative approach adopted helped us to remain flexible and to adapt to our increasing knowledge about our groups and to provide visits and experiences that were appropriate and of value to them. This approach was a challenge to the learning delivery team as firm plans could not be made and programme of activities could not always be delivered as expected; frequent last minute changes mean unexpected staff time to develop new materials at the last minute – not always easy given other commitments (see 3.7.5).

3.7.4 Capturing feedback / evaluation

Capturing evaluation feedback was a real challenge, throughout the course of the project – despite considerable efforts during our initial planning phase. Many of these challenges related to the specific nature of each group and as a result it took a while to ascertain the best ways of obtaining feedback or comments from each group

- AU – English was not the first language for the vast majority of the group and many did not speak any English. Translators were needed throughout the project, but were of particular importance when seeking feedback. Obviously this made the process of getting feedback more difficult as it separated us (the questioners) from the respondents. There was the potential for the feedback received to be influenced by the translators (who were also part of the group and thus had their own thoughts and opinions they were keen to share). Occasionally when a participant was providing feedback other group members would jump in and say 'what they are saying is ...' and then give their response. The running of the AU sessions were somewhat fluid by nature and gathering all of the women together to gain feedback during the sessions proved too difficult, especially close to the departure time. For this group feedback needed to be sought in the middle of the session when they were not concerned about getting to the coach on time; but this affected the flow of the programme.
- BDP – although we had a core group who attended regularly, a large number of participants only made one or two visits and it was impossible to know who was going to attend each visit. This made it difficult to plan feedback sessions and also gauge

progression / development of skills, understanding and perceptions; for example on the final visit when we had planned our main feedback session we found that many of the group were visiting for the first time.

- SMDS – advice sought from the group leader indicated that the members would be embarrassed if we scribed their thoughts and if writing was needed they would want to do it themselves. However, the main challenge was that this group were not demonstrative. Throughout the project we struggled to get beyond 'it's nice', 'it's wonderful', and 'whatever you think is best' responses. For the final visit we split the group into pairs and chatted to them, asking feedback questions. Staff and volunteers who had supported all of their visits led the conversations and this was a large contributing factor to the success of this feedback session – we knew the participants and they were more comfortable with us.

The members of BDP were the only group we could ask to write their feedback down and they were the most open about their experiences as they are used to personal reflection and providing feedback within their recovery programmes. Having said that, we still needed to find different ways of obtaining that feedback so that they didn't feel burdened by it; such as concept maps, post-it note comment boards, audio recorders (this did not work as they really did not like the idea of their voice being captured) and feedback forms. We feel that a project journal that was available for any and all to write in each visit would have been a useful addition.

We did trial other consultation techniques such as world café but with only partial success – perhaps due to our own inexperience in conducting the activity:

When researching World Café further, one element involved the creation of a conducive space for discussion in a relaxed manner, and tablecloths, flowers, and other elements were recommended – I thought one of our nursery trees could stimulate discussion. It did, but did not then encourage discussion of the topics we presented!

We trialled use of audio recorders for capturing informal feedback by recording whole sessions, but we did not appreciate just how long transcribing takes! In hindsight using the recorders at specific times and in targeted ways and including a budget to pay for transcription would have been more effective. When we used them for short periods, for example to record creative language generated by the SMDS when handling natural objects connected to the audio trail, we could record and use this effectively.

As highlighted above capturing verbal feedback from AU proved difficult due to language difficulties and the need for two-way translation. In hindsight we feel that the group was too large to effectively gather feedback during their visits. It worked much better in the smaller focus groups led by Asimina (from BGCI) back at the groups' community venue, during which a representative sample of 12 people gave their comments (much easier than trying to talk with 30+ people at a time!) Having an independent translator would also have helped (or alternatively recording the women giving responses to specific questions in Urdu and then having them translated at a later date).

3.7.5 Fitting with other work

HV is a key part in our ongoing process of developing Westonbirt's social role; however at present it is a very small part of existing staff's current roles. As a result the project was delivered within

a very full existing programme; a significant challenge for all involved. This has been exacerbated in part by our own inexperience in delivering these sorts of collaborative projects; our estimation of the time involved was substantially below what was actually required.

Unfortunately this has meant that we have not been able to spend as much time as we would have liked on certain aspects; for example staff personal reflection journals, photographic records and transcribing audios. In addition the 'aloof' staff observer planned for each session was not always possible (in hindsight we feel that this role is essential for collecting feedback and other records). Other aspects of our day-to-day work have also had to be put on hold.

This said, although this has made the project tough, it has also been all the more rewarding. The understanding/knowledge we have gained from taking part will not only help us be more realistic in future, it will also allow us to put the planning processes in place early that will ensure that some of the challenges we faced (e.g. communication, differences in priorities) do not arise. The programme of activities developed also provide a blueprint for sessions in future that we know is effective. Lastly, as our social role becomes more embedded in our organisation it is likely that community projects become a more regular part of our day-to-day work rather than one-offs.

4. Looking to the future; learning from the Hidden Voices Project

Using the findings outlined in section 3, this final section reflects on the key learning points we have learnt through the successes and challenges posed by the HV project before briefly outlining how we intend to build on the Hidden Voices.

4.1 Conclusions; 10 key learning points

Through development and delivery of the HV project we have learnt a huge amount; about the specific needs of different audiences and the process of managing community projects. Indeed although the positive feedback of the participants is very welcome (and meets our project objectives!), the ultimate success of the HV project has been what it has taught us about the potential positive role Westonbirt can play in society in future, and how we can best turn this into reality. Through analysing both the successes and challenges faced we have come up with a series of recommendations for future projects.

1 Double the time allowed; plan in contingency

Community projects need to be properly resourced and planned. Expectations need to be realistic and tied to an identified social role for Westonbirt. Project time needs to be allocated to staff job plans and careful consideration of other commitments needs to be taken into account. A clear project management process is vital for identifying all the tasks involved and who is responsible.

2 Early, in-depth discussions with community groups

Time taken at the start to get to know the group(s) and (in particular) the group leader is vital. Clear discussion of each party's objectives is needed at this stage so that a consensus can be agreed. Ensuring everyone understands what the project is about at this stage (and correcting any misplaced perceptions) will save time later and avoid the potential of discordance between a project/site objective and the needs of the group. However if this does occur – consider whose objectives really matter.

3 Pay particular attention to group leaders; they are the 'gatekeepers'

They need to be on side as the project will be coloured by the 'spin' they put on it. They may have different perceptions and values that need to be taken into account.

4 Involve the wider team

To embed Westonbirt's social role needs everyone to be involved – as the experience of HV shows those people with the most involvement often become the most passionate advocates for the future. As well as increasing buy-in (and the likelihood of genuine organisational change) this enables access to broader experiences and expertise – for example marketing, practical conservation, event management.

5 Start from where the individuals are at

Physically, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually – there is no point planning a complex environmental message (or creative output) if the participants do not have a basic understanding or interest! HV highlighted again and again the importance of understanding the audience

thoroughly and not making assumptions about individuals; people are always more complex than a single attribute.

6 The importance of sharing

Giving time to tea breaks and communal lunches is not wasted time; its when people relax and get to know one another.

7 Have a 'take home' element

Craft activities that give people a reminder of their visit and something to share with their families, friends and wider community proved a real success of HV.

8 Plan for relaxed control

As the HV project highlights sharing responsibility through a collaborative approach enables activities to be tailored to the specific interests/needs of the group and makes new audiences feel valued and welcome. In contrast HV elements that were more dictated by us (for example our creative legacy projects and environmental themes) were less successful. Discussion and feedback throughout the HV project were essential in helping frame the content of each session.

Expect the unexpected: plan in contingency activities and different options for each visit. Wet weather activities are essential for some groups.

9 Train volunteers so that they understand their role; select carefully

Having specific cohorts of trained volunteers supporting each group gave continuity, which was highly valued by the participants, and meant that they could support staff better by feeding into discussions / planning for subsequent visits, sharing their learning about the group and offering critical feedback. When working with specific groups it is vital to select the correct volunteers; this requires consideration of attitudes as well as their skills/experience.

10 Separate evaluation from delivery

We found it incredibly difficult to deliver and do evaluation simultaneously; they need to be separated out. In the case of both SMDS and AU the most effective methods were those that separated the groups into smaller 'focus' groups. Going to the community centre to collect feedback was also successful as it meant that we were not time limited and participants were not itching to get on with their activities (or get on the coach). Having someone (staff or trained volunteer) whose only role is to watch and record would also be useful.

4.2 Next steps; the legacy of our Hidden Voices Project

The HV project has been a success; despite the challenges we have achieved almost all of our ambitious objectives. As well as developing deeper links with the community groups involved we have demonstrated an effective collaborative approach to developing community engagement projects and in the process succeeded in challenging and changing perceptions of staff and volunteers.

Given the Forestry Commission's current review of learning services and Westonbirt's own development plans, the success of the HV project has come at an opportune moment to influence development of a clear social role for the arboretum. In mid-November we expect to hear about our phase 2 HLF application for our Welcome Building and associated Activity Plan and should this prove successful we will be recruiting two new staff members to work specifically to broaden our

audience profile and deepen wider community engagement. The lessons learnt through delivery of the HV project provide a clear blueprint for taking these roles forward.

Furthermore, the HV project is fully in tune with the aspirations of the Independent Panel's Report on the future of Forestry. However, how far the Panel's aspirations will be able to be delivered will depend on the Government's response and the accompanying financial settlement. Given the financial reality in which all organisations currently operate, resources are under ever increasing pressure.

Given these many 'irons in the fire' (and to give the team a break and the chance to step away from the project to reflect) we do not have immediate plans to deliver a new community project. Rather we feel that taking time to take stock is important. This said we are committed to developing our social role and we have several 'next steps' planned for 2013 and beyond:

1. Meet internally with the Director, Head of Visitor Attractions and wider management team to discuss their views on how we integrate the HV into our 5-year strategic plan. In particular we plan to
 - a. Identify and hone our social role – agree its purpose and place in our mission and within the Forestry Commission's priorities. This will feed into our new learning strategy, which is due in March 2013
 - b. Explore options for targeted entrance charges that enable us to reduce cost to community groups
2. Meet with our FOWA fund raising team to identify sources of funding that we can use to develop future projects – in particular to provide additional staff resource to help delivery
3. Meet with our community partners to see where we go from here. A measure of the success of the HV project is that all three groups have indicated that they wish to develop links further; for example as a result of the work with BDP their family unit and abstinence programme leaders are also interested in discussing possible partnership work; AU have said that they wish to continue to visit and hope to find the funding to meet transport costs. We will plan meetings in the New Year to arrange a 'keeping in touch visit' and to explore funding opportunities for further collaboration.
4. Meet with the volunteers involved to see how we can harness their enthusiasm; for example in taking ownership of some of the management and / or delivery of future projects
5. In addition we have had interest from other community partners working in the same fields; for example Nelson House in Stroud (working with people recovering from drug and alcohol related addiction). Taking care not to overstretch current resources we want to explore these links and in particular look at how we can use the successes of the HV project to develop scale-able elements that target the needs of particular groups. One area we have already identified is developing programmes for groups with mental health/drug-related issues that harnesses the therapeutic benefits of Westonbirt's tree collection

Lastly; we will continue to act as positive advocates for the social role of botanic gardens and will promote the HV project and what we have learnt within our local and national networks such as BGEN, and of course, BGCI.

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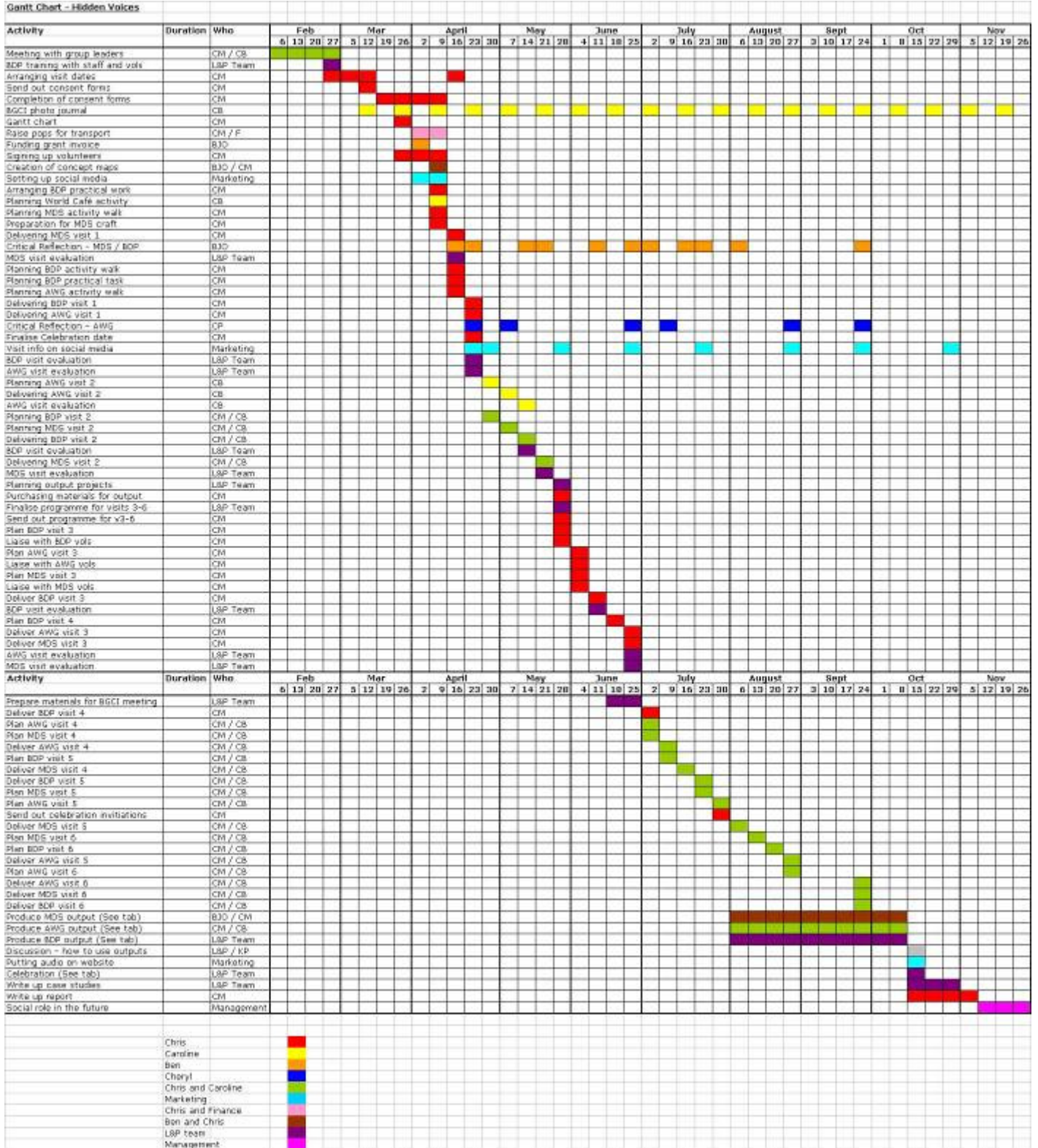
Demographics statistics sources

A variety of local/regional reports have been used to compare Westonbirt's visitor data with its catchment area. These include:

- Census data for Gloucester, Gloucestershire, South Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Bristol and Swindon
- The Gloucestershire Story (2008) by Gloucestershire County Council
- Deprivation in Bristol (2007) by Bristol City Council
- SW Regional Development Agency (2006) *Regional Economic Strategy for South West England 2006-2015, Evidence Base*

6. Appendices



Appendix One; Gantt Chart for delivery of project and celebration


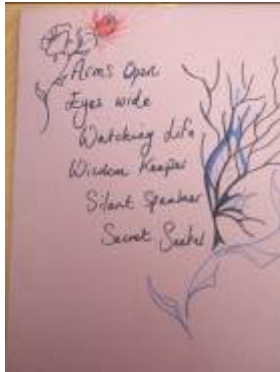


Celebration - Hidden Voices - Oct 17th																
	27	30	1	2	3	4	5	8	9	10	11	12	15	16	17	
Book tractor / trailer	Red															
Book car	Red															
Invitation list	Red															
Send out invitations - vols and TB		Red														
Photo exhibition comments	Yellow															
Gather remaining photos			Red	Red		Red	Red									
Create exhibition								Green	Green							
Menu template	Yellow			Yellow												
Transfer recipes onto template				Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow									
Finalise recipe book										Green	Green	Green				
Record audio - stops 1-3				Red												
Record audio - stops 4-6						Red										
Record audio - stops 7-9							Red									
Record audio - stops 10-12									Red							
Email leaders Re speeches		Red														
Display in learning centre														Red	Red	
Create flags for audio trail												Red				
Gather items for display												Green	Green			
Create AU photo board + CD/book										Red	Red					
Create MDS photo board + CD/book										Red	Red					
Create BDP photo board + CD/book										Red	Red					
Order / buy alternative food / gf																
Who's doing what on the day		Brown														
Volunteer briefing																
GOH bunting														Brown		
GOH displays														Purple		
Check audio working in GOH																
Report writing		Brown					Brown	Brown								



Appendix Two: Session outlines


BDP

Session Number 1		 	
Overarching session objective		To introduce Westonbirt, its global tree collection and the range of activities we can offer. To develop coppicing skills	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Guided walk	<p>To introduce participants to Westonbirt</p> <p>Take part in a range of activities so that participants can feed in ideas for rest of programme</p>	Circular Ride and Main Drive	<p>Savill Glade - Background to Westonbirt</p> <p>Tree scents – Douglas fir, Winter’s bark, Grand fir</p> <p>Sir George’s Segment - Silver birch / Oak / Yew / Wood is good – with carvings – explore the idea of carbon storage in wood products</p> <p>Tree stories - Wollemi Pine</p> <p>Tree textures – meet a tree</p> <p>Tree management – air layering – rhododendron on Circular drive</p> <p>Tree tastes – sugar maple</p> <p>Tree stories – Japanese Maples and climate change</p> <p>Tree descriptions – explore through senses, collect phrases and ideas to describe, create poetry or prose</p>
Laurel coppicing	<p>To introduce coppicing as part of woodland management</p> <p>To involve participants in a conservation project on site</p>	Entrance to Old Arboretum	<p>Tool talk</p> <p>Demonstration of coppicing</p> <p>Discussion about purpose of coppicing laurel hedge</p> <p>Coppicing at waist height</p> <p>(this was then cut to floor level later with chain saws which upset some of the participants on their next visit, thinking that this could have been done all along and maybe their input was not worth much – this was remedied next visit)</p>

Session Number 2		 	
Overarching session objective		To complete coppicing of laurel hedge – focus on benefits to wildlife, collection, use of cut material	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Laurel coppicing	To make links between coppicing activity and purpose in managing the collection and improving wildlife	Entrance to Old Arboretum	Completing the coppicing of the hedge Emphasis was made regarding the reasons for coppicing at waist height and different uses of material – chipper and wood fuel
Kennings and riddles	To creatively describe a tree of particular importance to them	Grandfather Oak	Choose a tree of interest, use pairs of words to describe the tree, using many different senses and relating to feelings. Combine these Kennings to create a riddle for the rest of the group to solve
Journey sticks	To verbal tell the story of their Westonbirt journey that day	Victory Glade	Create a representation of their journey at Westonbirt and tell that story to the group
These roots of mine	To make personal links with the growing, living tree collection and their own lives	Holford ride and Lime Avenue	In their own space write about parts of a tree, its role and character and how this relates to their lives. No one wanted to share this writing as it was personal to them.

Session Number 3		 	
Overarching session objective		To improve an area for wildlife – ride widening	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Ride widening	To improve an overgrown ride for access and wildlife	Oak Avenue, Silk wood	Loppers, slashers, secateurs, pruning saw Cutting back
Natural art sculptures	Unknown – BDP leaders led this session and we were not able to contact them to discuss activities before the day	Savill Glade	Collection of natural materials and creation of natural sculpture



Session Number 4		 	
Overarching session objective		To create objects with coppice material, developing green woodworking skills	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Spatula making	To use wood coppiced by our resident coppicer to create a spatula Harvesting and using wood is part of the process of woodland management	Craft shelter	Led by Ruth Goodfellow Splitting wood with axe and knife, using shave horse and draw knife to carve a wooden spatula
Willow hurdles	To use coppiced willow to create a willow hurdle	Craft shelter	Using buff and white willow to weave a miniature hurdle – this became quite competitive. Participants were going to use the hurdles in their allotment or gardens
Photography workshop	Individuals to photograph the arboretum from their perspective in preparation for a photography exhibition	Silk Wood	Led by Graham Anstey – participants were each given a camera and then went off for their own walk, photographing areas of interest.

Session Number 5			
Overarching session objective		To engage families in a range of activities that explore trees and the global collection	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Activity walk	To provide fun and explorative ways for families to discover the woodland together	Old Arb	Listening game Art palette challenge – collecting more than 10 shades of summer Meet a tree Nature Detectives – animal signs bingo
Den building		Beeches Bank	Create a den to fit your whole family inside! Complete with waterproof testing.



Session Number 6			
Overarching session objective		To consider woodland sustainability – seed preparation and propagation – creating the next generation of trees	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Propagation tour	To enable participants to discover how Westonbirt prepares for the next generation of trees	Propagation Unit	From seed preparation to standing down – Caroline led a guided tour – there were many questions and interest
Seed collecting	To collect a variety of seeds that will illustrate different preparation methods	Old Arb	Group 1 – sapphire berry (pipping and warm stratification), spindle berry (wire sieve scraping and cold stratification) Group 2 – magnolia (cold stratification), beech (direct sowing), winged (de-winging and cold stratification)
Seed preparation	To prepare seeds using de-winging, wire sieve scraping, pipping / maceration and direct sowing	Learning Centre	
Photography	To provide an opportunity for new participants to be included in the	Old arb	


	photography exhibition		
Self-led exploration	Personal time to explore on their own	Old Arb	Every minute of the visits had been planned and it was important to give participants the time and space to simply experience Westonbirt


MDS


Session Number 1		 	
Overarching session objective		To introduce Westonbirt, its global tree collection and the range of activities we can offer	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Guided walk	<p>To introduce participants to Westonbirt</p> <p>Take part in a range of activities so that participants can feed in ideas for rest of programme</p>	Circular Ride and Main Drive	<p>Savill Glade - Background to Westonbirt</p> <p>Tree stories – magnolia and beetles</p> <p>Sir George’s Segment - Silver birch / Oak / Yew / Wood is good – with carvings – explore the idea of carbon storage in wood products</p> <p>Tree stories - Wollemi Pine</p> <p>Key Sensory Trees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sugar maple – taste - Magnolia – scent - Golden birch area – texture <p>Tree stories – sweet chestnut</p> <p>Tree stories - Wellingtonia</p> <p>Tree descriptions – explore through senses, collect phrases and ideas to describe, create poetry or prose</p> <p>Tree management – air layering – rhododendron on main drive</p>

Willow leaves	To begin to explore craft making with willow	Learning centre	Willow working was a request from the group – making a simple willow leaf was thought to introduce them to the properties of the material and enable us to build up their skills. Activity proved to be disappointing to the participants as it was difficult to achieve a 'professional' outcome
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Session Number 2		 	
Overarching session objective		To gather participant observations about trees along the proposed audio route	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Guided walk with audio recorders	To collect individual thoughts and experiences of the trees To enable the group to select the trees for the audio trail	Main and circular	How to use the audio recorder Walk along the route and record anything of interest to them, colour contrast, shape, texture, size etc
Willow hurdles	To make the link with young tree growth and carbon capture	Learning centre	Set up in pairs per table and volunteer or staff at each table. We collected willow and brought it to them and then helped them as necessary. A much more successful willow activity that all were proud of.

Session Number 3			
Overarching session objective		To choose the trees for the audio trail and explore any seasonal differences	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Guided walk led by volunteer guides	To listen and watch how participants interact with the trees and to make final selection of trees for audio trail	Main and Circular	Volunteer guides led a guided walk and encouraged participants to touch, talk and reminisce about the trees
Bird boxes	To make a link between carbon storage and wooden products	Learning centre	Using pre-cut kits (prepared by Graham Anstey), and screws to avoid hammers and nails.




Session Number 4			
Overarching session objective		To develop creative, sensory description of trees selected for the audio trail	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Creative descriptions Kennings	To encourage the participants to generate more creative descriptions	Learning Centre (wet weather)	Leaf, cone, bark material from each of the trail trees. Small groups with staff / volunteer – simply discussed the items, encouraging and developing descriptions of scent, texture, contrasts in visual features, memories.
Coasters	To use wood to create a useful product to use in the home	Learning centre	Sand, wax and fix felt feet to coasters – a set of 4 for each participant to make

Session Number 5			
Overarching session objective		To extend group's experience of Westonbirt's collection	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Guided walk	To extend experience of Westonbirt's trees by exploring a new area of the arboretum	Main to the Dew Pond	Walk to Dew Pond giving stories and information about new trees – mockernut, Macedonia pine, creation of Holford pine, Wellingtonia, Western Red Cedar This was too far for some – they managed the walk but were worried they wouldn't get back
Tie and dye	To create a tie-dye shopping bag using natural woodland dyes	Learning centre	Steeping of blackberries, using wooden discs and elastic bands to create pattern, soaking fabric for 10+ mins Had to be taken home to dry before revealing pattern. Remember to check the tightness of elastic bands before putting into dye bath!



Session Number 6			
Overarching session objective		Creative output – to create leaf print flags to illustrate tree on audio trail	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Guided walk	To explore the early signs of autumn		Abandoned due to thunder



Fabric printing	To create a visual display for the celebration to advertise audio trail	Learning centre	Leaf materials were collected that link with 12 audio trail stops. Participants used acrylic paints on fabric to print and shadow print leaf designs Remember that the vein print and shadow print can be achieved at the same time, is easier for visually impaired and creates a sharper result
Scent and taste test	Addition due to thunder storm		Quiz to see if participants could identify a range of tree spices by scent and different nuts by touch and taste. Unfortunately the sighted members of the group told the group what they were getting!
Autumn nature table	Addition due to thunder storm		Exploring a range of autumn objects



AWG

Session Number 1		  	
Overarching session objective		To introduce Westonbirt, its global tree collection and the range of activities we can offer	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Guided walk	To introduce participants to Westonbirt Take part in a range of activities so that participants can feed in ideas for rest of programme	Circular Ride and Main Drive	<p>Savill Glade - Background to Westonbirt</p> <p>Rhododendron - the story of Rhododendron and little alder</p> <p>Douglas Fir – Douglas Mouse</p> <p>Tree stories - Wollemi Pine</p> <p>Key Sensory Trees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sugar maple – taste - Douglas fir / grand fir / Winter's bark –




			<p>scent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Golden birch area – texture <p>Tree stories - Wellingtonia</p> <p>Tree descriptions – explore through senses, collect phrases and ideas to describe, create poetry or prose</p> <p>Tree management – air layering – rhododendron on main drive</p>
Willow butterflies	To create craft items from parts of a tree	Learning centre	Making the 4 wings and body separately and then joining together with pipe cleaners
Paper making	To gain a greater understanding of interests of the group		Using shredded office paper, paint and water to create sheets of recycled paper


Session Number 2		 	
Overarching session objective		Trees that feed us - To understand the importance of trees for food and drink	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Tractor trailer ride	To show the group more of the arboretum and explain some of the work and management of the site	Silk Wood	Very wet tour of Silk wood via wood chip facility, trial plots and maple loop
Tree food tasting	To discover a range of foods that come from trees	Learning Centre	<p>Large variety of tree food available for tasting, with photos of the trees they come from:</p> <p>Orange, apple, banana chips, pomegranate, mango, brazil nuts, hazelnuts, pine nuts, walnuts, chocolate, bounty bar, pineapple, maple syrup, elderflower cordial etc</p>
Spices scent quiz	To share their experiences of tree spices	Learning centre	7 different tree spices scent quiz
Coasters	To create a tree product related to food and drink	Learning centre	Used acrylic paints to decorate a set of coasters

Session Number 3		 	
Overarching session objective		Trees that entertain us – to consider the importance trees have in our leisure time	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Activity walk	To begin story telling with the group in preparation of creating creative output	Circular Drive	<p>Kennings – selecting pairs of words to describe a variety of trees</p> <p>Riddles – combining the kennings to create a riddle for other groups to solve</p> <p>Sharing stories from home countries</p> <p>[This was difficult – it seems the group’s love of story telling comes from them listening to stories rather than telling them themselves. May need a rethink]</p>
Book making	To consider the different ways trees are used in our leisure time	Learning centre	<p>Using a range of handmade papers from Nepal</p> <p>Create cover, prepare pages</p> <p>Sew pages, stick on cover</p>

Session Number 4		 	
Overarching session objective		Trees that clothe us - To discover a range of tree fibres and plant dyes	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Activity walk	To create stories about trees at Westonbirt	Old Arb	From that day to this – building up a story

			The group were asked to provide ideas and comments to create a 'just so' style story. Looking at key characteristics, memories and ideas these characteristics create and why the tree became that way.
Tree fibres and fabric quiz	To explore the range of fibres and fabrics that are created from trees	Learning centre	Small groups to go to discuss the different fibres and fabrics, what they are made from and what they are used for. Photos will link the different fabrics to tree species.
Tie and dye	To use woodland plants to dye fabric	Learning centre	Blackberry, acai berry, elderflower dye baths used to tie-dye fabric squares

Session Number 5		  	
Overarching session objective		To engage families in a range of activities that explore trees and their importance to people's lives	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Activity walk	To provide opportunities for the women to share their experience of Westonbirt with their children To enable the children to explore the trees at Westonbirt with their family	Old Arb	Reduce time and uneven sized groups resulted in a group of new adult participants and teenagers who went on a guided walk to the Dew Pond and a larger family group. Meet a tree, minibeast hunt and bird watching.
Willow hurdles	To use different woods and parts of trees to make craft items	Learning centre	White and buff willow used to create mini hurdles (age 7+)
Walking stick making			Coppiced hazel – bark peeled off and wool used to decorate (age 5+)
Clay leaf imprint tiles			Leaves rolled into clay to create a vein imprint (age 3+)

Session Number 6			
Overarching session objective		To explore the need to conserve global biodiversity of trees	
Individual activities	Objective of activity / link to main objective	Location and timing	Description of activity and props
Self-led walk	To enable the group to have personal time individually or in small friendship / family groups	Old Arb	-
Fabric printing	To bring together the different uses of trees focussed on during the project	Learning centre	Range of different tree leaves connected to the objects and products explored during the project. Group created fabric prints for display during the celebration.
Filming	To explore the need to conserve global biodiversity of trees	Learning centre	Asking members of the group to provide their thoughts about why and how we can conserve trees for the future Unfortunately after weeks of loving having their photos taken and being filmed by Ling, the group became very camera shy!

Appendix Three: Staff involvement in Hidden Voices

Name	Title	Involvement with Hidden Voices
Tier 1 - staff involved in the day to day management, delivery and evaluation of the project.		
Christine Meakin	Learning Supervisor	Main lead for project. Responsible for liaison with group leaders, project management, development/delivery of individual sessions, creation of creative legacy, coordination and training of volunteer support, coordination of evaluation processes.
Caroline Bennett	Learning Officer	Support delivery of project. Responsible for leading individual sessions and supporting Chris in coordinating visits. Create and maintain blogs through project.
Ben Oliver	Learning and Participation Manager	Oversee project. Support lead officer in delivering the project and provide 'critical friend' role during development of sessions. Aloof observer at sessions. Ensure project management is on track in terms of time/budget.
Tier 2 - staff from the wider team that provided practical support to aspects of project		
Cheryl Pearson	Volunteer Manager	Coordinated volunteer support for activities including necessary volunteer recruitment
Katrina Podlowska	Communications and Marketing Manager	Coordinated promotion of the project both internally and externally through blog, press releases, support for celebration event
Gina Mills	Marketing Officer	Supported promotion through attending sessions to take photographs for blogs and other social media.
Andy Jane	Operations Supervisor	Coordinated practical tasks for BDP – identifying work, training of volunteers and ensuring H&S
Greg Wright	Arboriculture Student, Tree Team	Provided support – drove tractor with trailer for AU group visit to Silk Wood.
Simon Hough	Recreation Manager	Helped to coordinate visits with VS team, ensuring that the site's management were aware of the project and what is happening when. Attended initial meetings.
Tier 3 - other members of the management team that set the arboretum's strategic framework. These staff attended meetings with BGCI as part of the project's aim to raise awareness and buy-in.		

Simon Toomer	Director	Attended first 2 meetings with BGCI. Helped ensure project profile is raised with Forestry Commission National Team in Bristol.
Paul Cody	Head of Visitor Attractions	Attended second meeting. Responsible for coordination of day-to-day running of the visitor attraction. Supported smooth running of project.
Mark Ballard	Curator	Attended second meeting. Responsible for tree collection management. Supported practical elements and formed link with tree team.

Appendix Four; Examples of creative outputs

Bristol Drugs Project - Photo exhibition – Perceptions

On an initial visit by this group they expressed great interest in a photo exhibition on site and in having the opportunity to use photos to represent their view on Westonbirt.

They were asked to photograph things of interest but to capture a different perception, a different viewpoint. For some photos in the exhibition this has clearly been captured and for other images the subject itself offers a different perspective.

Each photographer had three of their photos exhibited and where feasible they provided comments for these images. The arboretum director was invited to choose one photo from each photographer to be displayed as 'Directors Choice'.

The exhibition presented 57 perceptions of Westonbirt from 17 Oct – 4 Nov



Waterfall

The top of the stump looks like water falling into the centre.

Sarah



Mysterious

I like this image because the light and shadow are giving it depth and it also kinda reminds me of Christmas. It feels secretive and mysterious with the green leaves adding a festive hue.

Tina



Twisted nature

Initially we can see how the tree has twisted this way and that, I imagine to get around other trees and plants, to get at the sunlight. Though not a typical, upright, straight tree it has character and is beautiful in its own individual way, a bit like everything in nature, including man.

This is an example of an organism that has done what it had to do to survive. To me it's a symbol of hope. I have not lived a 'conventional life', have been mentally twisted up, but with sunlight and a good diet I can hope to live a healthy life for the remainder of mine. [Ben]



Although I'm not sure what it is it looks like a parasitic plant, but one that does not seem to be harming the tree. Perhaps the tree itself benefits in some way, I hope so.

Berti



Brimming

I think this is a particular point in the cycle of life where the body of this messenger of transformation – the cone – is full of all it needs to complete its role. However, in itself, against the vibrant background of new growth, the cone is already dying. Aesthetically the contrast of brown decay against the strength of the new growth is quite symbolic of sacrifice. **(Sam)**



Moon

The first time I looked at this photo, the first word that came to my mind was 'Moon'. I've never been there, but maybe in another life or in my dreams. There's something secret and sacred about it, which again there's that in my person as well. I always have a secret or two and I think this photo shows my spiritual side, the search for spiritual peace. **(Jorge)**



Burgeoning life

A bud that will open out to a beautiful flower. Around it are the leaves, big and green, reaching up toward the sun, searching for life. It reminds me of myself as a recovering addict and people in general reaching out for life. Life is a beautiful thing and although it can sometimes seem like a dark place we should try to make the most of it. **(Ben)**



Stroud Macular Disease Group – Audio descriptive tour

Participants chose 12 trees on a circular walk that were of particular interest, either through sensory exploration or for the stories they hold.

Larger yellow labels were designed and fixed to the trees – these show the colour contrast (black on yellow) and larger size font (50) to enable visitors with visual impairment to identify the trees on the trail.







The title of each tree label uses the descriptive language used by the group when exploring through their senses.

They also include different sensory symbols to encourage visitors to experience the tree in different ways.

An audio descriptive tour was recorded to invite visitors to explore the tree through their senses, following the actions and interests of the SMDS group. Information about the tree's importance to people and/or wildlife is also included.

Awaz Utaoh – Tree Foods Recipe Book

Following their obvious interest in tree foods the group were invited to provide recipes that included a range of tree foods from nuts, fruits and spices. These have been used to create a book that will be available for other visitors to see on site and on our website.

<h3>1 Haleem Recipe by Maqsuda</h3> <p>Ingredients</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 pkt special mix – Haleem with pulses 1 kg boneless chopped chicken 10 glasses of water 1 cup oil 2 onions, sliced ¼ fresh ginger, chopped ¼ bunch coriander, chopped 1 fresh lemon, sliced 	<p>Tree Foods within this recipe:</p>  <p>Lemon</p>  <p>Onions</p>  <p>Ginger</p>  <p>Coriander</p>  <p>Cloves</p>  <p>Bay leaves</p>	<p>Instructions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soak the pulses for 2-3 hours, though best soaked overnight • Fry the onions and put to one side • Heat 1 cup oil and add washed chicken. Cook for 10 mins. • Add drained pulses and spices from packet. Cook for 5 mins on medium heat. • Add 10 glasses of water and cook on medium heat, stirring now and then. Cook until most of the water has been absorbed. • When you can see pulses and chicken is cooked with not much water left in the pan, blend with a hand blender so that no lumps of chicken are visible. • Cook for a few minutes and then take off the gas. • Garnish with coriander, onions, ginger, lemon and green chillies to taste.
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Creative writing to be included in Seasonal Trails in the future

Kennings Poems

<p style="text-align: center;">Yew</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Soft leaves Bitter smell Spongy bark Long arms Shade umbrella Picnic tree Poisonous berries Breast cancer cure</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">English Oak</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Joined armour Ageing bark Standing tall Spreading wings Viney lime Green giant</p>
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These two kenning poems were created by members of Awaz Utaoh. The group were asked to generate pairs of words to describe the tree and their connections to it. These were then put together to form a poem for other members of the group to listen to and locate the tree.

Descriptive poetry

During the first 2 visits, members of the Bristol Drugs Project were asked to select a tree of interest and write a descriptive poem.

Giant sequoia

You're big and strong
Soft and spongy
Old and wise
Lots of memories!
Tall and proud
I'm happy to see you
[anon]

Shoulders leaning, leaves moving
Breezes flowing, perfume wafting
Two trees small in the land of the tall
[anon]

Acer palmatum

Lost in the moment
Least years leaves remind me of the future
It will come ready or not
The branches twist and tangle
Like thoughts in my head
The finest of leaves draped like a silk canopy
Just above my head
A parachute beneath a blue sky
[anon]

Personal connections

Members of the Bristol Drugs Project were invited to write about their personal connections to the trees. Only one person was happy to share their writing as others felt it was too personal.



*The tiny wren playing hide and seek,
The tree lined path it's secrets keep,
The inner child in me awakes
and makes a chain of daisies.*

*The connection to the earth is strong,
Among these trees with shadows long,
It grounds and calms my healing soul
and silences the crazies.*

*Fallen branches in the grass,
Like antlers from a deer,
It's easy to imagine now,
The fairies playing near.*

*And lying here on dampened grass,
I'm hypnotised by music,
I feel the turmoil slowing now,
The trick is not to lose it!*

Appendix Five; Outline for Celebration Day 17th October

- 10-10.30am:** Tea and coffee in the Great Oak Hall
- 10.30-11.30am:** Welcome from Arboretum Director Simon Toomer
Speeches from:
- Forestry Commission Chair Pam Warhurst;
 - Representatives from Bristol Drugs Project, Awaz Utaoh, Macular Disease Society
 - Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI)
- DVD of the project, commissioned by BGCI
- 11.30-12:** Move across to the Learning Centre for exhibitions of photography by Bristol Drugs Project and of the Hidden Voices project.
- 12 noon:** Celebration lunch in the Learning Centre using recipes provided by Awaz Utaoh. Recipes have been created by the group using 'tree food' (seeds, nuts, plants) and inspired by the workshops undertaken as part of the project.
- Afternoon (from 1pm):** Caroline Bennett will lead Stroud Macular Disease Society and other interested parties on launch of audio trail
Tractor and trailer ride to Acer Glade to enjoy autumn colour

Appendix Six; Evaluation methodologies used

Evaluation method	Objective of the evaluation	When did we use it	Description of what we did, questions
Concept mapping	To understand the initial perceptions participants held about Westonbirt and trees	During visit one with all groups	<p>SMDS – yellow paper and black pens were used and participants were invited to complete the following:</p> <p>I think Westonbirt is a place where...</p> <p>My thoughts about trees and climate change are...</p> <p>AU – large paper, small groups each with translator and scribe. Participants were invited to voice their thoughts about:</p> <p>I think Westonbirt is a place where...</p> <p>When I see trees from different parts of the world I think...</p> <p>I want to take part in the Hidden Voices project because...</p> <p>BDP – individuals were given their own concept map to complete:</p> <p>I think Westonbirt is a place where...</p> <p>People manage woodlands to...</p> <p>I want to take part in the Hidden Voices project because...</p>
Post-it comments board	To gain understanding of any changes to perceptions or understanding as project developed	BDP during 2 nd visit	<p>Participants were each given a small pile of post it notes and pen. For each question asked they wrote their thoughts and comments and added it to the comment board. Questions included:</p> <p>How do you feel being part of the Hidden Voices project today?</p> <p>What are your thoughts about woodland management?</p> <p>What are your thoughts about Westonbirt?</p>
Audio recorders	To capture feedback from groups as they are taking part in activities	SMDS during visits 2-4 BDP following visit 3	<p>SMDS – audio recorders were used:</p> <p>Recording whole sessions so to try and capture participants comments to each other about what they were doing and experiencing</p> <p>Participants recording their thoughts as they walked around the arboretum as a journal entry</p> <p>Recording specific conversations, such as responses to sensory exploration</p> <p>BDP – an audio recorder was given to the group and a peer support staff asked to 'interview' each participant about their experiences</p>
Learning diary	Capture quantitative data – how many participants, volunteers etc involved.	Throughout project	Simple spreadsheet for recording numbers etc
Focus group	Capture verbal feedback comments from selected group – audio recorded	AU, following visit 5	Undertaken by Asimina, BGCI, in order to gain feedback from AU. This method enabled participants to provide their comments without the need to read or write. Translators were available. Process took 1.5 - 2 hours.

Filming	Record verbal feedback about environmental theme	AU during visit 6	Two questions were asked willing participants: Why are trees important to people? How could we protect trees for the future?
Participant feedback forms	Capture feedback from individual participants at the end of the project	Visit 6 with SMDS and BDP	SMDS – pairs were joined by staff or volunteers (who scribed answers) BDP – individuals who had also been to Westonbirt on one of the previous visits were given a feedback form Questions: How has taking part in this project changed / developed your thoughts about Westonbirt? What have you gained during your visits to Westonbirt? What have you enjoyed most about taking part? What could we improve in future? What are your thought about trees and climate change (SMDS) / sustainable woodland management (BDP)
Staff questionnaire	To explore the impact of the Hidden Voices Project on staff perceptions of Westonbirt	Summative. Survey sent to management team	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has HV changed your perceptions about Westonbirt's role in society? 2. How do you see this influencing how Westonbirt develops in the future? 3. What has been HV value to Westonbirt-could this have been improved by doing things differently? 4. What are the benefits of working with groups over multiple visits? 5. Has HV thrown up concerns about working with different audiences?
Volunteer questionnaire	To explore how the Hidden Voices Project impacted on the volunteers' knowledge / perceptions	Summative. Survey sent to all volunteers involved	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you feel that you benefited from supporting HV? 2. What did you learn about working with these different groups and did this change your perceptions about the participants or yourself? 3. How do you feel Westonbirt benefited from HV? 4. What is your favourite anecdote/story from the sessions you supported?
Reflective journals	To record delivery of the project and capture insights into the collaborative approach.	Throughout project Learning and participation team	Staff kept journals for each session recording what was done, successes and issues arising. Staff were also encouraged to reflect on their own feelings. These were used for internal discussions.