



Environmental Leadership Programme

ELP2 Programme Development Report:

Moving Towards Participant- Centred Impact Measurement



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Executive summary

Year 3 of the Environmental Leadership Programme sees a significant shift in how we approach impact measurement. The changes aim to directly address the challenges of low response rates and survey fatigue as identified in the Year 2 end of programme report. This year we've moved from extracting data from participants using surveys and statistical data collection to co-creating evidence with them throughout the programme year. We've tried to step away from a 'catch all' approach to participant data and be led more by participants and what they want to tell us about what is important and meaningful to them and their journeys. This report outlines our transition to storytelling, authentic engagement and integrated data collection.

This shift in our data approach mirrors the developmental insights we've gained through our Share, Learn, Improve (SLI) work around belonging and movement building as part of our CAF (Community Action Fund) funded programme. And also The Wildlife Trusts' wider organisational evolution towards authentic storytelling and narrative-driven impact. Utilising existing opportunities through campaign development with experts at 'Don't Panic', and communications strategy work with 'Storykind', The Wildlife Trusts are consciously choosing more bold, genuine messaging rooted in community voice. ELP2's data developments follow these same principles, with the programme both informed by, and contributing to, this broader cultural shift in how we understand and communicate environmental impact, especially in regard to people's involvement with nature.

This report explores how the new insight data collection methods also have benefit beyond impact measurement, supporting us to also become more participant focused and community driven, while feeding into the wider movement's capacity to tell compelling, authentic stories of environmental change.

1. Building on Year 2 learnings

The challenge

- Year 2 graduated 36 participants with only 17 completing matched pre/post surveys
- Response rates declined from 69 (pre-programme) to 17 (post-programme)
- Significant staff time was spent chasing completed surveys
- Participant fatigue from multiple separate data collection touchpoints
- The mostly quantitative measures weren't capturing the full impact story.



Our data collection approach was creating barriers rather than capturing authentic programme experience and impact. The stories we managed to gather, like Helen's journey from eco-anxiety to empowerment and Lauren beginning to see herself as a confident co-leader (full stories can be found in the Year 2 impact report), showed us what was possible when we captured the real human experience behind the numbers.

Our SLI work highlights the importance of feeling a sense of belonging to young people's increased engagement and improved experience on our programme. On reflection our approach to participant impact data felt transactional and disconnected from the experiential, community and participant-centred ethos of the programme. The programme expected participants to complete surveys in their own time and too often made their experiences and journeys fit within preexisting data fields. For example, using surveys and interview frameworks with set questions to capture data from the majority of the cohort, while reserving more in-depth, listening-led conversations for just a handful of participants at the end of the programme. Too much focus was placed on what we had anticipated young people would gain — the value we had planned for them — rather than exploring what often turned out to be a richer reality of the actual value the programme held for them as individuals.

Practices felt misaligned with the ELP2's values around co-creation, belonging, and movement building so we began developing fresh data collection strategies that would support us to tell compelling stories about impact by collecting authentic stories, not just statistics. This new approach does not diminish the value of the data collected in Years 1 and 2; rather, it enhances it by adding depth, context, and insight to our existing evidence base.

2. Changes to and development of data collection

Streamlined data points across the participant journey

The following table compares data collection in Year 1 and 2 with year 3:



Year 1-2	Year 3	Rationale
Initial data collected through recruitment: • Application form • Onboarding phone calls • Nature Connection Index.	No change.	The recruitment and onboarding data work well – it happens naturally as young people engage with and join the programme and offers early insights and a start point for our data stories.
Post-programme survey and Nature Connection Campaigns (NCC's) feedback as three separate form-based activities.	Group NCC reflection in-session activity. Nature Connection Index and post-programme survey all within contact hours.	Bringing data collection into contact hours reduces additional asks on participants and maximises response rates. Positions data and reflection as a crucial part of the programme rather than a 'nice to have'. Creates accessible, mindful spaces for participants with complex schedules.
One-to-ones and reflections as separate activities.	One-to-ones are combined with mid-programme reflections and follow a set framework to gather qualitative insights into individual participant experience - participants complete this themselves prior to the meeting.	This allows the delivery team to provide focussed pastoral support. Able to review the participant's individual reflection document before their one-to-one so that thought can go into addressing any issues. Doc used as a guide for more in-depth conversations with participant's individual group leads.
Three termly reflections as standalone tasks done in participants own time.	Reduced to two meaningful reflection points – mid and end of programme.	Reduces burden on participants whilst capturing richer, more meaningful data at key moments. Allows participants to process experiences and recognise growth at strategic points in their journey.

A community engagement survey accessed via a QR code for people engaging with NCCs to complete (poor response rates and pre-determined).	A formalised Data Officer role has been created for each Nature Connection Campaign (NCC) group who has set objectives and a formalised process for collecting data for their NCC.	The NCC Data Officer role supports both campaign delivery and data collection simultaneously by helping groups capture meaningful evidence. Embeds evidence as part of good campaign design, builds participant capacity as community organisers and develops skills in data gathering and impact across the youth movement. Shifts towards more qualitative data, mirroring the programme delivery.
Ad hoc insights into participant journeys through conversations with programme team.	Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact (MEI) Lead attends in person events to listen to and gather qualitative data directly. Team 'data downloads' after in-person events and at the end of each term - online, workshop style meetings where the delivery team has dedicated time to think, reflect on and record any observations and meaningful conversations they've had with participants.	Formalises the capture of observational evidence that could otherwise be lost. Reduces burden on participants to self-report whilst capturing rich contextual data that surveys miss. Creates space for collaborative sense-making and celebrating successes within the team. Captures programme impact in ways participants might not recognise or share (e.g. inclusive behaviour, self-awareness, critical thinking).
Post programme 3- and 6-month surveys sent to alumni.	Alumni online event - partly a networking and development opportunity with a guest speaker or panel and partly focus group style conversations to share and capture the longer-term impact of the programme on their individual journeys. Alumni case studies - capturing longer term impact on individuals and NCCs.	Shifts from extractive surveys to community-building events that serve multiple purposes. Creates opportunity for ongoing movement activities and connection. Generates authentic stories and evidence of sustained impact while maintaining alumni engagement and sense of belonging to the wider movement.

Image below: A visual aid representing the participant journey of the ELP2. Different modules are colour coded to allow an understanding of how the learning is stacked. Also included are the different milestones and activities individuals taking part develop through.



Key improvements

We've reduced from three termly reflections to two meaningful reflection points - at the mid-programme point during 1-2-1s and at the end of the programme. Individual NCC feedback is now integrated into the post-programme survey. Most significantly, we're bringing data collection into contact hours and no longer asking participants to complete surveys in their own time. By making completion part of the programme experience, we're maximising response rates while reducing additional asks on participants and positioning data and reflection as a crucial part of the programme (as well as a critical transferable skill to develop) rather than it seeming like a 'nice to have'. Our learning teaching us to meet participants where they are in terms of their needs and expectations.

The changes also reflect our SLI learnings about creating accessible, mindful spaces. When data collection happens during contact hours, participants with caring responsibilities, multiple jobs, or limited digital access at home aren't disadvantaged. It means the programme can honour participants' time and create space for deeper, more meaningful conversations too.

Leaning into more qualitative data

We have introduced more journalistic-style discussions during in-person events and improved our strategy around collecting video testimonials during sessions. Our MEI Lead now attends more in-person events for real-time conversations and observing details that demonstrate engagement and behaviours that we were unable to capture previously. Our Comms team and Data Officer work together at in person events to spot and capture meaningful video moments and testimonials. We hope this will mean that programme stories are developed organically through the team listening to and observing the cohort during programme hours. Dedicated time is built into the programme delivery team's roles to reflect on and record these, as well as capturing participant voice through their own words, photos, and creative outputs (for example during nature connection activities).



By building in more time for participants to connect with each other and reflect on their programme experience, we naturally have more opportunity to observe and gather insights into participant experience, whilst also allowing the cohort to have the space to build their own community. This shift reflects our wider work towards an approach that values 'holding space' for participants, over just 'delivering to' them. When participants share their experiences with each other, they are given the opportunity to process and reflect on this, which can also create the connection and sense of collective purpose that underpins movement building.

Team 'data downloads'

These are formal sessions underpinning how our delivery team contributes to evidence that help tell individual participant and NCC stories and evidence the wider impact of the ELP2. Held after key events and at the end of each term, these download sessions bring the whole team together to reflect on and record their observations and experiences of the cohort and programme so far. Facilitated by our Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact lead, we discuss and capture observations from sessions, memorable participant quotes and moments, patterns in engagement and development, as well as any challenges and breakthroughs.

These sessions mean we can reduce the burden on participants to self-report whilst also capturing rich contextual data that surveys can miss. They contribute towards greater pastoral understanding and support needed by individuals during the programme, as well as creating valuable space within the team's busy schedules for collaborative sense-making that might otherwise have been lost.

3. Nature Connection Campaign data and evidence

The NCC Data Officer role

Year 2 presented a real challenge as the team only received eight community engagement survey responses across four campaigns. For Year 3, we have tried to mitigate this and be realistic about the risks of relying on response rates – especially from community members outside of the programme who engage through interaction with the programmes' NCCs. The NCC Data Officer role has been developed to support **both** campaign delivery **and** data collection simultaneously by helping groups capture meaningful evidence to support their campaign's story and offer embedded support throughout the process.

Each NCC will establish a member to volunteer to be their dedicated Data Officer, who will then join a group of other NCC Data Officers who are guided through the data collection process by the programme's MEI lead. The revised data collection for year 3 mirrors the shifts towards more towards more observational and qualitative data outlined above that the programme team are using more this year, whereby NCC Data Officers will spend time engaging with community members and then reflecting on and recording these observations and conversations.



This also provides individuals within the cohort a new opportunity to develop further skills around data gathering and impact measurement, building skills and confidence. By embedding the Data Officer role within campaign development, we are supporting participants to think about evidence as part of good campaign design, not just as an afterthought or obligation. This builds their capacity as community organisers by supporting them to better understand how to demonstrate their impact to stakeholders by capturing what outcomes can mean for people and making connections between benefits for nature and people. Crucially, participants will also explore how these impact stories can be shared strategically to resonate with others who may relate to similar experiences, galvanising further support, solidarity, and collective action within and beyond their communities.

4. The CAN App

The CAN App was launched in 2025 by The Wildlife Trusts to track how closely connected individuals or groups are to nature, through observable behaviours. By measuring engagement across a participation scale, the software provides The Wildlife Trusts with a centralised data collection platform to capture and track progression of community action for nature.

Individuals can use the tool to capture their observations of specific community groups or individuals, recording in-the-moment reflections on the groups' attitudes and behaviours towards nature and climate action. Over time, with multiple inputs, the app allows the tracking of a community group, enabling larger scale analysis of community action for nature, as well as longitudinal tracking of specific communities over time.

New this year, we have developed a data sheet for NCC Data Officers to complete as part of their campaign work, reflecting the questions of the CAN app. This means not only are we able to record the cohort's action for nature with the app, but we will also be able to capture individual NCC engagements with communities too, with the hope being that over time we will be able to analyse the collective picture of the ELP2's community engagement. It will give us a snapshot of the different levels of connection and engagement across communities the programme and participant campaigns reach, whilst also feeding back data into the wider work of The Wildlife Trusts.



5. How it's working for data collection so far

At the midpoint of Year 3, the changes to our data collection approach are delivering measurably better results than previous years. The shift from extractive surveys to integrated, participant-centred methods is generating richer, more usable evidence whilst simultaneously improving participant experience and programme delivery.

The changes discussed in this report are showing the following:

Improved response rates and engagement

Mid-programme reflections collected during one-to-ones have been hugely successful. At the beginning of February, 43 participants have submitted reflections ahead of their meetings with Group Leads. With another 3 weeks left of this process we are in a strong position with both the reflection submission rates and the quality of the data being significantly more meaningful and useful than previously.

Quality and depth of data - moving beyond surface-level statistics to authentic stories

The qualitative richness of our Year 3 data significantly exceeds what we captured in Years 1 and 2. Already throughout the first half of the programme we have been able to capture authentic participant voices that reveal the full complexity of their experiences and impacts.

For example, our new approach captured Amir's profound reconnection with childhood and cultural identity through nature connection activities:

"I have grown up with a picnic and outdoor and nature enthusiast family, but life suddenly changed (urban lifestyle took over) and we were not able to plan such activities, to a point that I had totally forgotten about that side of myself. These activities have been reminiscent of my childhood and the memories I have made with my family who live in another country, helping me stay calm and feel better when times get tough."

This level of depth - connecting nature experiences on the programme to family separation, urban displacement, cultural heritage, and emotional regulation, would have struggled to emerge from our previous survey questions, and may have been lost without our team's active observation, listening and recording of participant data. The story reveals programme impact across multiple 'tricky to measure' areas such as wellbeing, identity and belonging.

Team data downloads and observational evidence - capturing what participants can't or don't self-report

The introduction of formal team 'data download' sessions is proving valuable for capturing evidence that would otherwise be lost and giving meaning and direction to our storytelling.

Data from in-person session observations documents:

- Participants actively including others in conversations: *"The cohort were very good at including others in their conversations at the start of the day. There seemed to be lots of*



groups of 5+ individuals in the morning, and I noticed people actively trying to go around and introduce themselves to others."

- Community and friendship formation: *"Friendships are developing across the cohort, with people sharing lifts and conversations becoming more personal and in depth."*
- Collective hope and responsibility: *"Many individuals are keen to share their experience of nature, many speaking about their childhoods and upbringings. There is such a lovely sense of hope and building hope together across the cohort. Through connecting and learning about each other, the group seem to be understanding the power of collective movement and action. For example, speaking about how different fields can work together and how different skills are needed."*
- Exceptional self-awareness: *"This cohort appear to be extremely aware of their own needs and engagement styles—there was a sense of them knowing how they needed to manage their own energy—taking breaks or time out—using headphones, going for short walks, standing instead of sitting."*

These observational details demonstrate programme impact in ways participants might not recognise or articulate themselves. The cohort's inclusive behaviour and self-awareness are outcomes of the programme's culture, captured only because we now build in time for the team to reflect and record. The data gives us clear evidence of the programme's ability to hold space for young people to build their own community.

Real-time evidence gathering at events

Enabling our team to take more time to reflect on the delivery of sessions is revealing nuance that surveys alone cannot capture. During the Privilege, Identity and Belonging session facilitated by Naftal Zinyemba (EDI Officer, Campaigning and Communities, RSWT), the team documented the sophisticated questions participants were asking:

- *"Should people be charged to enter green spaces given increasing capitalisation?"*
- *"How to measure successful inclusivity in events/campaigns?"*
- *Noting social class intersection: "most politicians went to a public and private school, the same people trying to remove the environmental protections to make more profit"*

These questions demonstrate critical thinking about systemic issues, class dynamics, and the relationship between capitalism and environmentalism – something we have struggled to evidence outside of a self-reported survey post-programme previously.

Participant voice and authentic storytelling

So far, we can see Year 3's approach generating stories that communicate programme value to external audiences in ways statistics alone cannot. Charlie's reflection from the very first online session perfectly captures the programme's core impact:

"I think the best thing about this course is that it provides us hope, and allows us to actually try and make change, because when you don't do anything (mostly because people don't know how) you feel powerless, hopeless, but this programme equips us with the tools and skills to cancel that out, which is so invigorating and exciting, so thank you!"

This quote communicates more about programme impact than pages of survey statistics. It demonstrates the emotional journey from powerlessness to agency, names the barrier (not



knowing how to act), identifies the solution (tools and skills), and captures the resulting emotional state (invigorated and excited). This is the quality of storytelling our new approach makes possible.

Evidence of leadership and movement building

Our new qualitative approach is revealing programme impact extending beyond the cohort. One participant's reflection documents how programme learning is influencing her university experience:

"I've brought up what I learnt about Nature Connection Campaigns to the society I'm part of in university, Climate Justice Society, and we are now preparing for a biodiversity festival around this idea."

This tangible impact, an entire university biodiversity festival initiated because of programme learning, demonstrates our programme aims in action. Maryam's personal connection to nature has evolved from individual engagement to active advocacy. Her journey from learning about nature connection to implementing and advocating for it demonstrates her understanding of how connection drives behaviour change. Most directly, she is pro-actively taking her organising skills into her own community, mobilising her existing university network to multiply the programme's reach.

By asking participants about how they're applying learning in other contexts we are revealing the programme's broader reach and the movement-building ripple effects we aim to create.

Data that improves pastoral support and programme delivery

The integration of mid-programme reflections into one-to-ones with participant Group Leads, is generating crucial pastoral intelligence that helps us support participants better. Our Pastoral, Wellbeing and Safeguarding framework has allowed us previously to identify challenges individuals face upon application the programme via the pre programme survey data and phone calls. The new emphasis on mid-programme reflection one-to-ones is building on this, allowing the team to better understand any challenges presenting themselves on the programme and the impact on participants, giving us the opportunity to support individuals and manage challenges, improving the participant experience. For example, we learned that several participants are navigating significant health barriers such as medication changes, fatigue and ADHD.

Having insight like this enables us to adjust our approach, provide targeted support, and ensure the programme remains accessible to participants with diverse needs. It also documents that we are managing to successfully support those who face barriers to environmental sector participation.

Data that enables continuous improvement - strengths and challenge areas

This approach is generating actionable intelligence for programme development. We now



have clear evidence of what is working exceptionally well:

- In-person nature connection activities consistently identified as programme highlights
- Recorded session availability enabling participation despite competing commitments
- Privilege, Identity and Belonging session creating deepest resonance
- Programme successfully creating psychologically safe space for vulnerable participation.

Equally valuable, we have clear evidence of areas needing attention:

- Discord platform consistently problematic for participants
- Some campaign groups struggling with progress and dynamics
- Missing in-person sessions creating disconnection and feelings of guilt
- Communication overwhelm and need for clearer advance information.

This feedback enables our team to be responsive to challenges immediately, rather than waiting for development ahead of the next programme cycle. For example, we can address missing sessions and individual feelings in one-to-one discussions with Group Leads to support, reassure and where needed make action plans with individual participants. We will also run a drop-in Discord refresher training and be more mindful of streamlining programme communications where possible.

NCC Data Officer Role

While it is too early to fully evaluate the volunteer participant Data Officer role's effectiveness (campaigns are still in development phase - pitching at Dragon's Den at the end of February), initial signs are promising. The role is being taken up by participants who recognise its value for their campaign's story. A data officer (8 in total) is allocated to each NCC group and signed up to attend a specific training session with our MEI Lead ahead of the whole cohort attending the curriculum session on understanding how to measure the impact of their NCC's.

Whilst this has been positive with team reflections showing that most groups are beginning to think about evidence from the design phase rather than as an afterthought, the programme team have also been able to use the early delivery of the Data Officer role to observe and note that some groups are enthusiastically planning their campaigns but need support implementing community organising principles first. This early insight occurring from conversations with Data Officers has flagged problems early on and helped the team to provide targeted guidance before campaigns develop too much.

Alignment with programme values

Year 3's data collection approach aligns with programme values in ways our previous methods did not. By integrating data collection into contact hours, positioning reflection as a valuable programme activity, and creating space for participant voice, we are hoping to model the co-creation and participant-centred approach that is core to ELP2's style.

Participants are experiencing data collection as part of their learning journey rather than as extractive, with the mid-programme reflections supporting them to process their experiences, recognise their growth, and articulate their learning. This also offers valuable skills for their



development as reflective practitioners and community organisers. Our data so far suggests that we are successfully delivering data collection that helps builds community rather than extracting from it.

6. Looking ahead

Looking to the rest of Year 3 and beyond into Year 4 and our legacy work, we want to continuously monitor and reflect on how changes to our data collection are working.

Priorities include:

- Delivery of our data collection developments throughout the Year 3 programme as set out in this report
- Testing the reunion/focus group alumni approach before the end of the Year 3 programme
- Reviewing the NCC data collection and evidencing – ensuring to capture Data Officer's feedback on their experience of the process
- Develop our tracking of movement building – integration with and connection to wider activities outside of the programme (such as with a wider group of young people engaging with others and Wildlife Trust activities on communications platform Discord) and to other projects through RSWT and SWT youth initiatives
- End of programme impact comparison with Year 2 – specifically looking at whether response rates, stories and the richness and usability of qualitative data collected improves.

Additionally, through our SLI lens, we are watching for:

- Evidence that data collection builds (rather than extracts from) community
- Participant sense of ownership over their stories and impact
- Team capacity to use stories for movement building
- Alumni participation in ongoing movement activities tracked through Discord and beyond.

Conclusion

The ELP2's Year 2 reporting showed us that when we capture rich individual stories, like those of Helen and Lauren referenced earlier, alongside case studies captured so far, we can tell the real story of the programme's impact.



Year 3's programme development has centred around creating the systems and approaches needed to capture those stories systematically, authentically, and sustainably. We have tried to move away from data being an additional ask for participants and instead position it as an integral part of their reflective journey through the programme, reinforcing its importance to effective campaigning and community organising.

This shift reflects both the participant-centred approach that is core to the ELP2's unique programme style, and the recent insights from our SLI work.

Our data collection is no longer separate from our community building. Instead the programme authentically draws out and adds to the participant experience by embedding data collection into contact hours through reflection and listening. By leaning into more qualitative methods, and positioning our programme within The Wildlife Trust's broader youth strategy, we hope to build evidence that doesn't just demonstrate the ELP2's impact, but that amplifies participant voices and strengthens the movement for environmental change.

Similarly, within the environmental sector, we hope this shift towards storytelling on ELP2 supports the call within The Wildlife Trusts for a more people-centred approach to communication and impact measurement. We aim to support and contribute to more bold and confident messaging, so that ELP2 becomes part of a larger narrative that demonstrates not just what young people accomplish, but how they are transforming environmental spaces from within.

Even at this programme year midpoint our data suggests that Year 3's integrated, participant-centred approach to data collection is delivering measurably better results. We are capturing richer stories, achieving more meaningful data from more of the cohort, supporting better pastoral care, and generating evidence that serves both impact measurement and movement building purposes.

The changes outlined in this report are working. The data we are gathering tells the authentic story of young people developing as environmental leaders, combating eco-anxiety through collective action, and building the skills and networks they need to create change.

The work ahead in the second half of Year 3 will see the team test and refine these approaches. We are working towards Year 4 seeing us as confident in delivering data collection across the programme that can effectively deliver story-driven impact measurement that truly represents the experiences of young environmental leaders. More than that, we hope to be able to capture the ways in which young individuals are themselves creating the movement they want to be part of, telling the stories of how young people are leading environmental change across communities and sectors in the ways that work for them.



