

Health and Well-being in the Great Outdoors!

D. Leonard 2025

Research

- Complete the questionnaire on the form. Answer instinctively, do not over think this.
- Go and walk on one of the campus wellbeing walks or sit in an area of natural beauty
- Come back to the classroom for 12.30 latest, sooner if you are finished.
- Bring with you a natural item (not living!!) that you felt some connection with or affinity to.

The Peace of the Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come to the peace of the wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

W E N D E L L B E R

Health and Wellbeing: What does it mean?

- **Health** is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. (WHO, 2020)
- **Well-being** can be understood as how people **feel** and how they **function**, both on a personal and a social level, and how they **evaluate** their lives. (NEF, 2012, p6)
- **Well-being** includes the presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, happiness), the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), satisfaction with life, fulfillment and positive functioning. (CDC, 2018)

[Research: Nature Experience as a Determinant of Mental Health](#)



Biophillic Hypothesis

Term invented by psychoanalyst Eric Fromm in the 1960's. Edward Wilson authored the first book on Biophilia in the 1980's (Wilson, E. (1984). *Biophilia*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press)

Suggests humans have an innate need to connect with nature and other forms of life. (Bio = Life, Philia = attraction to)

Now considered within town planning and architecture – biophilic design.

Another theory behind the challenges of a more urbanised society and tech focused disconnected lifestyle – important in conservation.

THE FREAKY WORLD OF FRACTALS

BBC





Key Facts

NCDs are responsible for

71%
of all deaths worldwide
(41 million people)



Each year...

the **lives** of

15 million people
are **cut short** due to **NCDs**

Nearly **800,000**
people die from suicide

Every **2 seconds**
someone aged 30 to 70 years
dies prematurely from **NCDs**



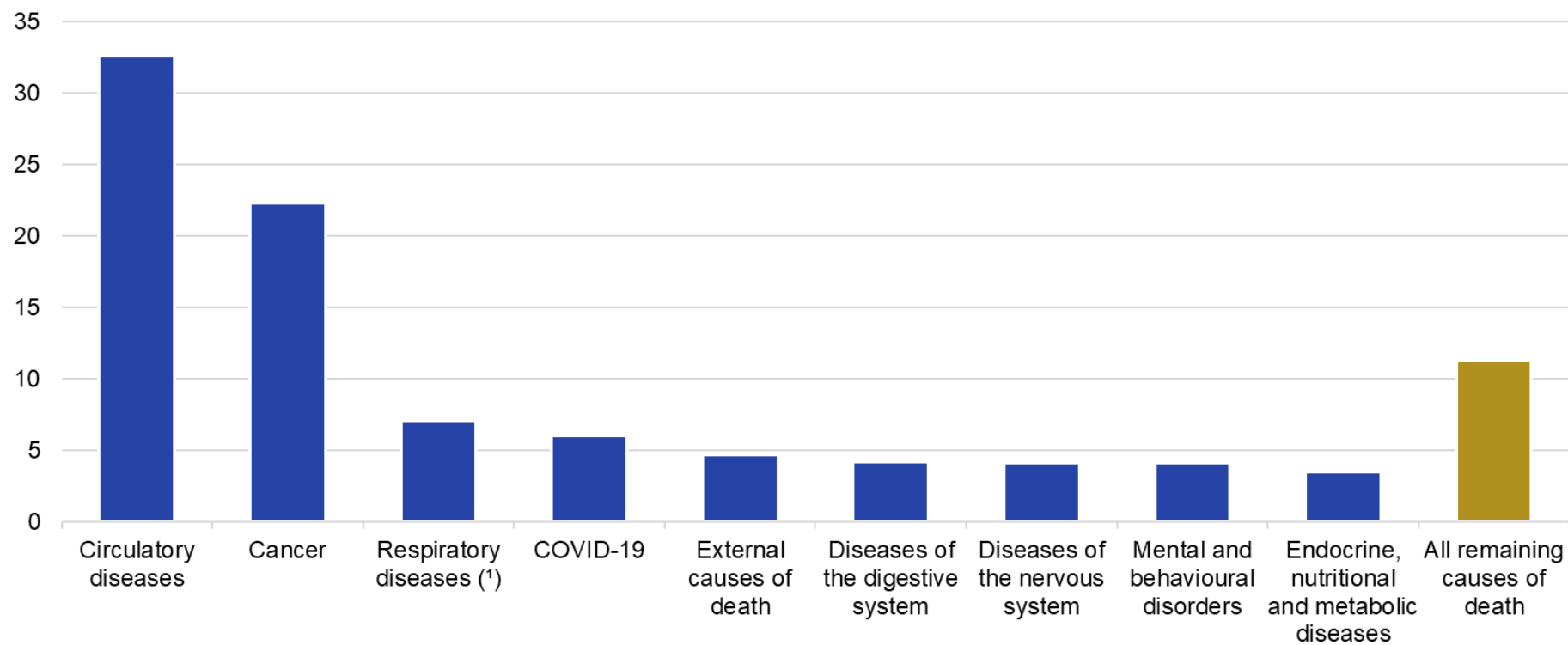
Poorer people are
disproportionately
affected by NCDs and
mental health conditions



(WHO, 2021)

Share of main causes of death, EU, 2022

(%)



⁽¹⁾ Excluding COVID-19.

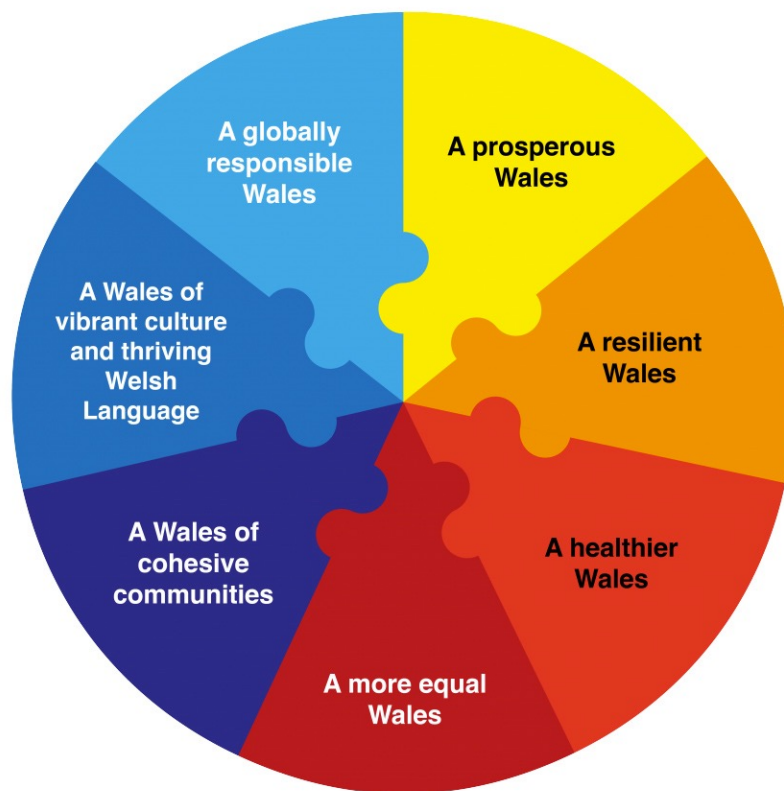
Source: Eurostat (online data code: hlth_cd_aro)

The Health Foundation 2024

- The current and incoming governments face an uphill challenge in improving UK citizens' health – and life expectancy. Good health and wellbeing are the UK's most precious assets – they enable people to achieve their potential, fuel the economy and help build a stronger society. However, the current cost-of-living crisis and historically weak income growth, pressure on diminished public services and strain on health and care services do not point to sudden future improvements.
- Improving the nation's health should be a key driver of government policy, with stalling life expectancy to receive the same amount of attention as stalling productivity and wage growth. Improving health needs long-term cross-government action – across the building blocks of health, such as good quality jobs and housing, as well as wider public services.

Wales Focus: Wellbeing of Future Generations (Big Picture)

- Act of Parliament (2015) – World Leading
- Applies to all public bodies in Wales
- Accountability – Provision of evidence
- 7 Wellbeing Goals



Individual Well-being (Small Picture)

Dr Happiness says: Well-being consists of life satisfaction (cognitive), pleasant affect, and unpleasant affect (moods and emotions) (Diener & Suh, 1997, p. 200) *Social Studies*

Dynamic Equilibrium Theory: relates to the understanding of wellbeing in terms of the challenges that an individual faces and therefore in terms of how wellbeing is a fluctuating state. (Dodge et al, 2012)

Wellbeing is measured through **all 3 human domains** and is entirely subjective:

- Physical
- Affective (emotional)
- Cognitive (psychological)



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Building resilience and well-being for post-covid adolescents through outdoor adventure

John Francis Allan, Adele Doran, Ruan Jones & Sarah Farrell

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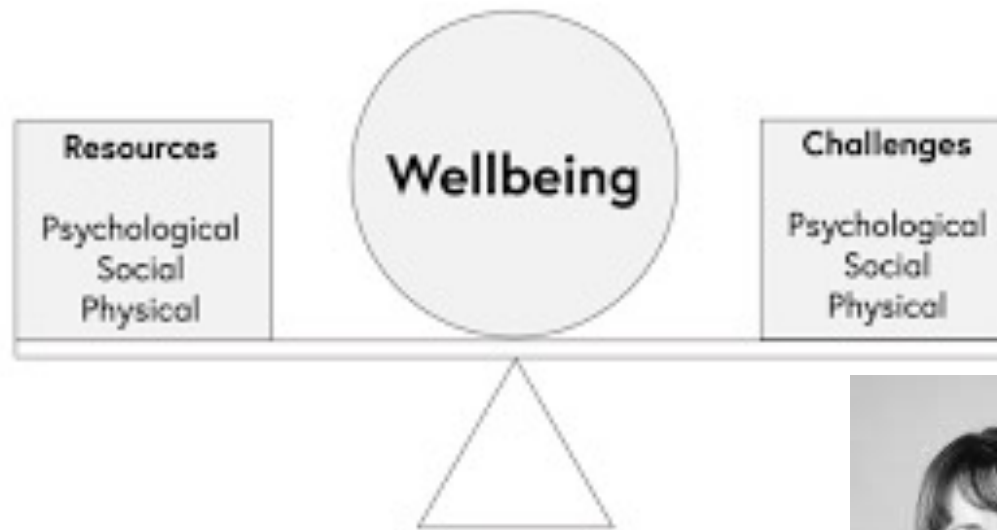


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Individual wellbeing in Outdoor Adventure Education – Resources v Challenge



In essence, stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their wellbeing, and vice-versa (Dodge et al, 2012, P.9)

- Cognitive
- Affective
- Physical

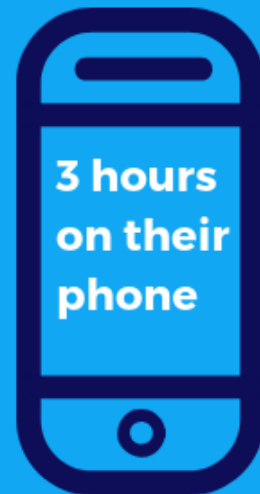


[Guardian Article on Risks of Cold Water Swimming](#)

The role of Technology



Children and young people told us that, in a typical day they spend an average of...

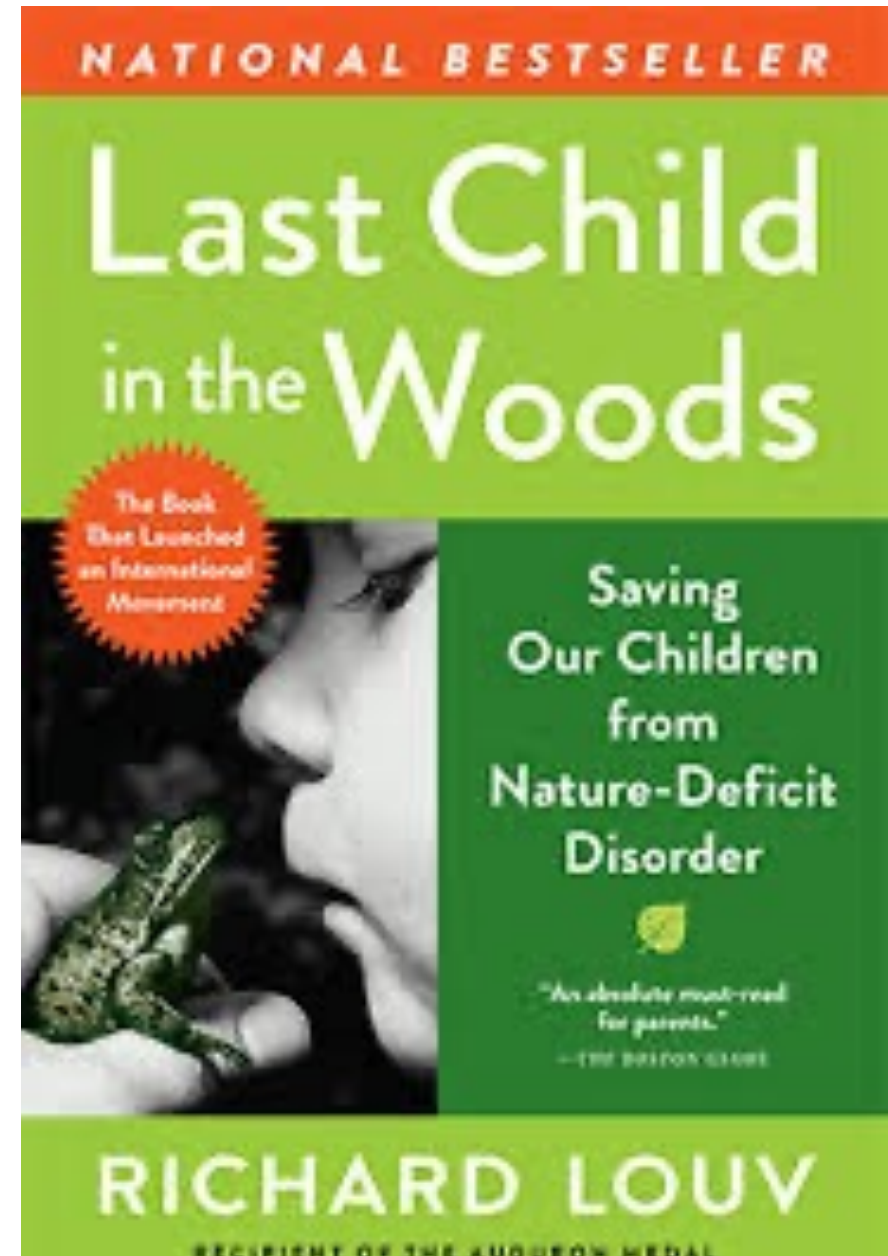


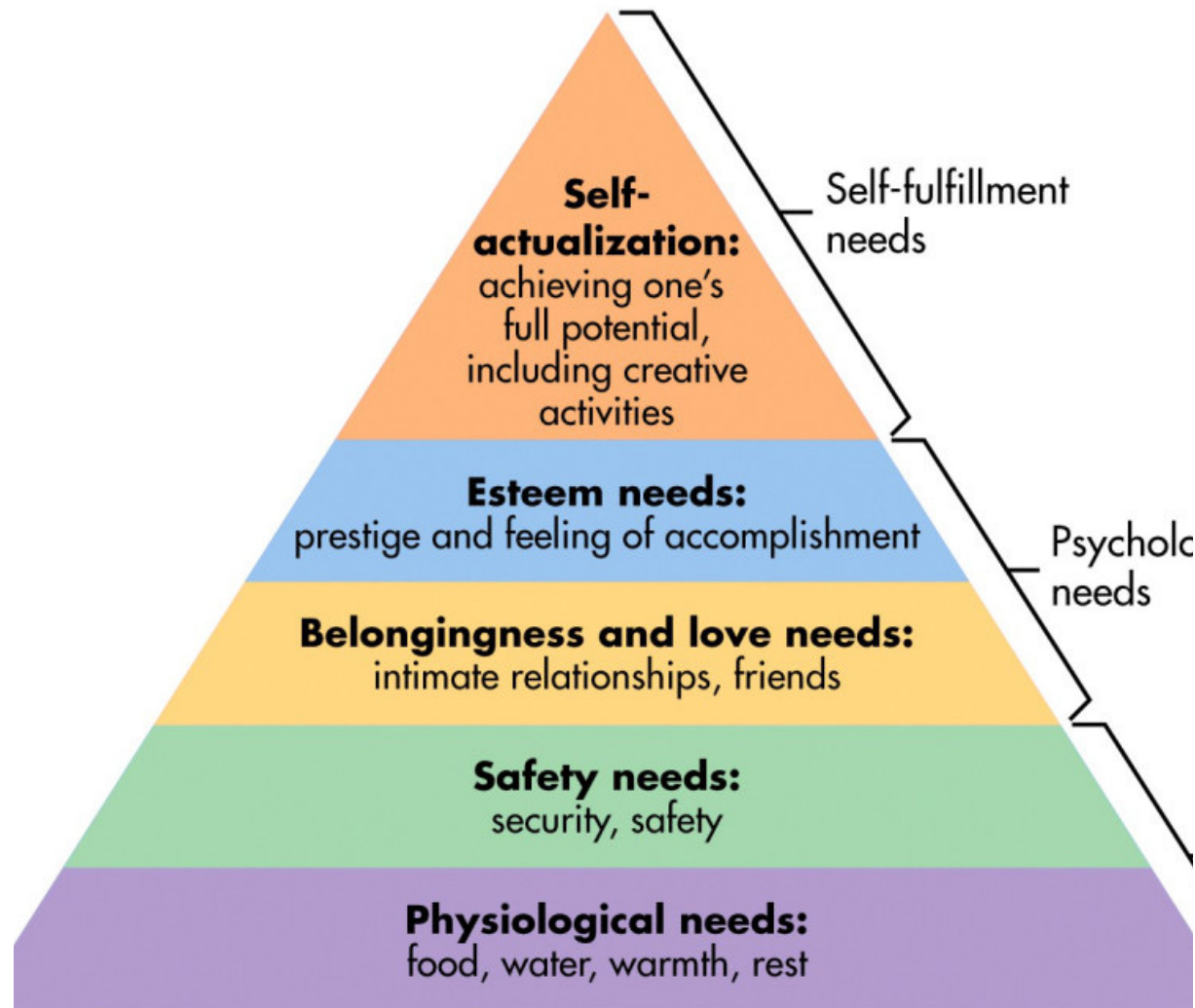
109 children and young people aged 11-24 years took part in this engagement exercise.

What is the
relationship
between
adventures
in the great
outdoors
and well-
being?

[Project wildthing!](#) – A protest
film (2013) One mans attempt
to kick start a movement! –
Led to the ‘Wild Network’
(see links at end)







Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Collecting the evidence

Perceived Stress Scale - recognized psychological measurement tool

Pre and post measures to look at distance travelled

One way of evidenceing impact.

No tool is perfect or can be used in isolation

Quantitative measurement – far easier to provide as credible evidence! Much in OAE is qualitative.





Obesity Crisis:

- Overweight and Obesity rates in Adults and Children has more than doubled in last 30 years. (Healthdata.org; 2025)
- Deprivation is a predictor of obesity.
- 90% of diabetes in the UK is type 2 and incidence has doubled in last 20 years
- Type 2 diabetes has only been seen in children in last 15 years, youngest case in 2015 aged 3.



- **Economic Wellbeing:** Household disposable income, average wages, cost of living, relative wealth.
- 5.2m children live in poverty in the UK (about 25%)
- Average house is 8x average salary compared to 5x in 2002.

Building resilience and well-being for post-covid adolescents through outdoor adventure; John Francis Allan, Adele Doran, Ruan Jones and Sarah Farrell (2024)

- More than ever before an enormous amount of unmitigated information is at young people's fingertips. Therefore, the measure of a young person's knowledge is not the amount of this information they can retain (cognitive skills), but their ability to curate (filter and process) material coupled with an understanding of how, when, and why they should or should not use it
- Resilience has been referred to a person's capacity to modify behaviour in response to environmental hazards, thrive and self-fulfil despite or even because of stressors
- Research shows, if appropriately delivered to meet the diverse needs of young people, OAE does generate meaningful educational outcomes in exciting natural settings which builds strengths in young people. This adaptive quality allows people who learn in environments which require use of multiple senses and where situations are not uniform and predictable, to perform better across a range of physical and cognitive tasks than those in uni-sensory settings

Case Studies

Research ONE of these projects:

- [Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health project](#) – Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum
- [The Journey Programme](#) (Venture Scotland)
- [The Wave Project](#)
- [Adventure Therapy](#) – Psychosis Wales

Focus on:

- Purpose (aspect of health and wellbeing)
- Audience (who is it for)
- Claims (what does it claim to achieve?)
- Funding (Who pays for it?)

Further Research

- World Health Organisation – www.who.int
- New Economics Foundation – www.neweconomics.org
- Institute for Outdoor Learning – www.outdoor-learning.org
- The Venture Trust 'Venture Mor' – www.venturemor.co.uk
- Natural Resources Wales – www.naturalresources.wales
- The Wild Network – www.thewildnetwork.com

- <https://www.englishoutdoorcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2049-High-quality-outdoor-learning-web-version.pdf>
- <https://www.walescouncilforoutdoorlearning.org/>
- <https://www.walescouncilforoutdoorlearning.org/high-quality-outdoor-learning/>
- <https://www.outdoorlearningwales.org/home>
- <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/read-our-natural-childhood-report.pdf>
- <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/50-things-to-do-before-youre-11--activity-list>
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