

CASE STUDY

Time to Connect: A Team Development Day for Mental Health Staff



IDENTIFYING THE NEED

Staff within Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) work daily with children, young people and families experiencing distress, trauma and inequality. The emotional demands of this work have highlighted the importance of supporting staff wellbeing, morale and time for reflection.

Team leaders identified a growing need to create protected time for staff to reconnect with one another, reflect on their practice, and explore approaches that support both personal wellbeing and clinical work.

There was also an opportunity to strengthen staff understanding of how nature-based and creative approaches can enhance mental health outcomes for young people, particularly those experiencing health and access inequalities.

THE CHALLENGE ON THE GROUND

CAMHS teams often have limited opportunities to step away from clinical settings for learning or reflection. When services are busy, staff wellbeing activities can feel difficult to prioritise, even though they are known to be important.

Traditional training sessions do not always meet the deeper needs of staff, such as feeling connected, valued and supported by colleagues. There was also a need to ensure that any activity funded by the charity was purposeful, inclusive and linked to workforce development.

The challenge was to create a meaningful, affordable activity that supported staff wellbeing, strengthened team relationships and enhanced practice with children and young people.

HOW WE RESPONDED

With modest support from the Charity, CAMHS held a winter professional development day just before the 2025 Christmas break. The day took place at New Craigs Hospital and in nearby Craig Dunain Community Woods.

The day was planned in partnership with Nature4Health and Public Health colleagues. The programme included a mix of learning, reflection and practical activities:

- **Learning in nature:** A session led by Public Health explored the mental health benefits of nature connection for children and young people, alongside practical ways this can be used in CAMHS work. An interactive activity on health inequalities helped staff reflect on unequal access to healthcare and green spaces. One participant shared that this was **“a powerful reminder of the unequal access to healthcare and green spaces faced by some young people and families we support.”**
- **Reflection and rest:** Staff took part in a seasonal reflection linked to the winter solstice, encouraging them to think about what they wanted to let go of from the past year and what they wanted to carry forward.
- **Movement and creativity:** Mindful movement and simple creative activities around the fire helped staff slow down, reconnect with their bodies and enjoy being playful together. As one staff member reflected, **“The day was a powerful reminder of the value of slowing down and being present – and that the outdoors is always welcoming, even in winter.”**
- **Connection and gratitude:** The day ended with a shared gratitude circle, giving staff time to acknowledge each other and the importance of team support.



THE CHANGE WE ACHIEVED

The day had a clear positive impact on staff wellbeing and team connection. Staff described feeling refreshed, valued and more connected to colleagues. Being outdoors and away from usual workspaces created a relaxed atmosphere that encouraged openness and reflection.

One staff member shared:

“The day provided an opportunity to step outside the usual environment and engage with colleagues in a different way. Being in nature fostered an opening up and sharing of perspectives.”

Others highlighted the sense of connection created through shared experience:

“Sharing fun activities in an informal and natural setting highlighted how these kinds of experiences can strengthen bonds between us.”

Staff also reported increased confidence and motivation to bring elements of nature into their work with children and young people.

As one participant noted, the day was “a simple but powerful reminder of how connecting with the natural environment can enhance wellbeing for ourselves and the young people we work with.”

By supporting staff wellbeing, we helped strengthen a resilient, connected CAMHS team, benefiting both staff and the children and families they support.



THE JOURNEY AHEAD

This professional development day was part of a wider project called *Enabling Connections through Green and Creative Spaces*, funded by NHS Highland Charity and NHS Charities Together. The project supports young people’s mental health by creating opportunities to connect with nature and creativity in their local communities, while also helping to reduce inequalities in access to wellbeing support across Highland.

The positive impact of the day highlights how important it is to look after the wellbeing of the staff who care for children and young people. When staff feel connected, supported and valued, they are better able to provide compassionate, high-quality care.

This story shows how modest support can make a real difference, creating space for teams to learn, reflect and grow together, and ultimately improving the support offered to children, young people and families across Highland.

