

# Nature Buddies:

The role of volunteer-led support in enabling people to engage in community activities to support their health and wellbeing

## Resource pack



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# Introduction

This resource pack accompanies the Nature Buddies toolkit. It includes additional resources that can be used by charities, community organisations, local authorities, physical activity partnerships, green providers, community volunteer services and health providers.

This pack includes template role descriptions for Nature Buddies, some additional case studies about existing projects, and a template induction guide. These materials can be adapted for your local context.

Thank you to all our partners who have contributed towards this work.



# Nature Buddies: Role descriptions

These are possible template role descriptions for Nature Buddies, focusing on different specialisms and tasks. Please adapt these descriptions to fit your local context.

Role title	Nature Buddy (Communication)
<b>Purpose of the role</b>	A Nature Buddy is a volunteer who supports an individual to connect with nature. The Nature Buddy builds their confidence and ability to take part in the activity which has been prescribed for them and helps them to overcome any barriers that stand in their way. A Nature Buddy will find what best suits the person they are supporting and will support them on their journey to living a happier and healthier life.
<b>What you will be doing</b>	<p>This role is a home-based administrative role that provides you with an opportunity to support people in a flexible, but very important, part of the Nature Buddy programme.</p> <p>You will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• receive contact details for people who have a Nature Buddy that they meet face-to-face</li> <li>• contact each person by phone, text or email before their next meeting with their buddy to remind them about the session</li> <li>• keep records of your communications and their outcomes</li> <li>• follow-up with any people who have missed their first session</li> <li>• report your activity and any concerns to your volunteer coordinator</li> <li>• maintain strict confidentiality.</li> </ul>
<b>Skills, experience and qualities needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No special qualifications or experience needed.</li> <li>• You will need to be well organised.</li> <li>• You must be willing to use your own phone and/or computer.</li> <li>• You will be understanding, patient, empathetic and good at listening.</li> <li>• You should be enthusiastic about the benefits of outdoor environments and have an interest in nature, although you don't have to be an expert.</li> <li>• You will need to have a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check.</li> <li>• It is likely that contact details will be stored online, so you will also need internet access and some IT skills.</li> </ul>
<b>When and where</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is a home-based opportunity.</li> <li>• We expect it will take about half an hour, two or three times a week.</li> </ul>
<b>Support offered</b>	You will be given induction and initial training. You will receive ongoing training and peer support at regular volunteer meetings with other buddies.
<b>What you could get out of it</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop new friendships and interpersonal skills.</li> <li>• Feel part of making a meaningful difference to someone who needs your support.</li> <li>• Gain experience in the social care sector or environmental sector.</li> </ul>
<b>Other relevant information</b>	There are four complementary Nature Buddy roles that offer you a range of different kinds of involvement to suit your own time availability, interests and skills.
<b>What to do if you're interested</b>	Contact...

## Nature Buddies

Role title	Nature Buddy (Walk companion)
<b>Purpose of the role</b>	A Nature Buddy is a volunteer who supports an individual to connect with nature. The Nature Buddy builds their confidence and ability to take part in the activity which has been prescribed for them and helps them to overcome any barriers that stand in their way. A Nature Buddy will find what best suits the person they are supporting and will support them on their journey to living a happier and healthier life.
<b>What you will be doing</b>	<p>In this role, you will meet with a person regularly over an agreed period to take a walk outdoors together. It is an opportunity to support people in a simple, practical, but very important, part of the Nature Buddy programme.</p> <p>You will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• encourage the person that you are buddying to get outdoors for a walk</li> <li>• meet them at an agreed point – which could be their own home</li> <li>• walk and talk with them</li> <li>• keep records of your communications and their outcomes.</li> <li>• follow-up any missed sessions</li> <li>• report your activity and any concerns to your volunteer coordinator</li> <li>• maintain strict confidentiality.</li> </ul>
<b>Skills, experience and qualities needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No special qualifications or experience needed.</li> <li>• Flexibility.</li> <li>• Approachable, relatable, reliable, trusting, understanding.</li> <li>• A friendly personality with time to listen and respond to individual needs.</li> <li>• Empathy, friendly, non-judgemental.</li> <li>• You should be enthusiastic about the benefits of outdoor environments and have an interest in nature, although you don't have to be an expert.</li> <li>• You will have to have a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check.</li> <li>• It is likely that contact details will be stored online, so you may also need internet access and some IT skills.</li> </ul>
<b>When and where</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is a community-based opportunity.</li> <li>• We expect it will take about an hour a week.</li> </ul>
<b>Support offered</b>	You will be given induction and initial training. You will receive ongoing training and peer support at regular volunteer meetings with other buddies.
<b>What you could get out of it</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop new friendships and interpersonal skills.</li> <li>• Feel part of making a meaningful difference to someone who needs your support.</li> <li>• Gain experience in the social care sector or environmental sector.</li> </ul>
<b>Other relevant information</b>	There are four complementary Nature Buddy roles that offer you a range of different kinds of involvement to suit your own time availability, interests and skills.
<b>What to do if you're interested</b>	Contact...





## Nature Buddies

Role title	Nature Buddy (Mental health supporter)
<b>Purpose of the role</b>	<p>A Nature Buddy is a volunteer who supports an individual to connect with nature. The Nature Buddy builds their confidence and ability to take part in the activity which has been prescribed for them and helps them to overcome any barriers that stand in their way. A Nature Buddy will find what best suits the person they are supporting and will support them on their journey to living a happier and healthier life.</p>
<b>What you will be doing</b>	<p>You will be providing support for someone with mental ill health to help them to benefit from taking part in activities out-of-doors.</p> <p>You will meet with a person regularly over an agreed period to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• help with practical aspects of outdoor activities (such as gardening), guiding clients and reassuring them with new and unknown activities</li> <li>• facilitate the social side of the activities, making sure no-one is left out</li> <li>• keep records of your communications and their outcomes</li> <li>• follow-up any missed sessions</li> <li>• report your activity and any concerns to your volunteer coordinator</li> <li>• maintain strict confidentiality.</li> </ul>
<b>Skills, experience and qualities needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No special qualifications or experience needed.</li> <li>• Flexibility.</li> <li>• Approachable, relatable, reliable, trusting, understanding.</li> <li>• A friendly personality with time to listen and respond to individual needs.</li> <li>• Empathy, friendly, non-judgemental.</li> <li>• You should be enthusiastic about the benefits of outdoor environments and have an interest in nature, although you don't have to be an expert.</li> <li>• You will have to have a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check.</li> <li>• It is likely that contact details will be stored online, so you may also need internet access and some IT skills.</li> </ul>
<b>When and where</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is a community-based opportunity.</li> <li>• We expect it will take a couple of hours a week.</li> </ul>
<b>Support offered</b>	<p>You will be given induction and initial training. You will receive ongoing training and peer support at regular volunteer meetings with other buddies.</p>
<b>What you could get out of it</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop new friendships and interpersonal skills.</li> <li>• Feel part of making a meaningful difference to someone who needs your support.</li> <li>• Gain experience in the social care sector or environmental sector.</li> </ul>
<b>Other relevant information</b>	<p>There are four complementary Nature Buddy roles that offer you a range of different kinds of involvement to suit your own time availability, interests and skills.</p>
<b>What to do if you're interested</b>	<p>Contact...</p>



# Nature Buddies: case studies

These case studies add to the examples of projects in the Nature Buddies toolkit.

## Case study: b:friend's Green and Blue project

### Organisation background

**b:friend** is a charity working in South Yorkshire which aims to reduce loneliness by creating long-lasting, meaningful friendships through:

- volunteer befrienders who visit a socially-isolated 'older neighbour' each week
- social clubs which offer a wide range of activities to improve wellbeing.

### Aims of the project

Improving mental health and quality of life through supporting older neighbours to access the natural environment, by using befrienders and group activities to remove some of the barriers that older people face getting out into nature.

### Funding source

The project was funded through the South Yorkshire Community Foundation's Green Social Prescribing Grants Programme (February 2022 – January 2023).

### Volunteers

Volunteer befrienders were matched with an older neighbour based on locality and personal interests. Each pair received:

- ideas of nature-based things to do and local places to visit
- a bundle containing binoculars, bird seed, a window hung bird feeder, travel sweets and picnic vouchers to spend on a day out
- regular support from b:friend.

### Activities provided

b:friend provided barge trips; days out to local beaches, parks, gardens and beauty spots; an art exhibition featuring paintings and sculptures from some older neighbours; and a 'virtual woodland experience' for people with mobility issues, where they projected pictures of woodland and played the sound of birdsong.

### Challenges

Transport – the number of pick-ups they could realistically do was limited and identifying suitable pick-up points was difficult.

The type of referrals received – many referrals were for people who were, for various reasons, simply unable to get out into nature.

### Measuring success

- The number of people attending trips or days out.
- Anecdotal feedback about the bundles and trips.
- The number of people who went on to have further involvement in the activities offered, for example by joining a social club.

### Further information

[www.letsbfriend.org.uk](http://www.letsbfriend.org.uk)

## Case study: Nottingham Refugee Forum

### Organisation background

Nottingham Refugee Forum offers practical advice, information, support, and campaigning on issues affecting refugees and those seeking asylum in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. The Forum supports asylum seekers and refugees in gaining just outcomes, rebuilding their lives, and integrating into society.

### Aim of the project

Our vision is to have a safe green space where all clients (including children), volunteers and staff can engage in a range of social, educational, therapeutic, and creative activities; learn about nature; grow plants and food; or simply sit.

### Funding sources

Varied, including private sources and local groups.

### Volunteers

Local volunteers from the town and county help with gardening and activities. They are paired with new garden volunteers from the refugee community.

### Activities provided

Planting, weeding, building compost heaps, wooden frames for growing, making a pond, paving paths, painting, willow weaving, bug hotels, tree planting.

### Challenges

**Bad weather.** Over the winter period most volunteers from the refugee community prefer to avoid the cold and rain. Local volunteers had limited capacity or would take their holidays during this period.

**Timescale.** It was difficult to build and maintain friendships/Buddying relationships in this period.

**Capacity.** Those managing the project had limited time resources to follow-up. It needs a dedicated worker to run a project like this.

**Stability.** In the refugee community, asylum seekers could be moved away or gain their status and stop volunteering in the garden. This meant that some beginning surveys could not be followed up.

### Measuring success

Measured in satisfaction, retention, and numbers of volunteers.

The surveys should be dignified and trauma-informed. Instead of asking people if they are satisfied with their lives, asking if they feel valued or listened to may be more appropriate. Some of the language might need to be simplified for those with less English.

Building closer relationships, such as through Buddying, can only be successful when those taking part are seen as equals with gifts to share.

### Further information

[Nottingham Refugee Forum](#)





# Nature Buddies: induction

We have created an induction pack for Nature Buddies schemes, which you can download [here](#).

This induction presentation was originally created through Green Space, a partnership approach to Green Social Prescribing in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. Please adapt it to your local context.

Thank you to Natural England, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care System and Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service.





National Academy for Social Prescribing

