



Walking together to overcome mental health illness

Based in Norfolk, Discovery Quest is an innovative walking therapy for adults with severe and enduring mental illness. Over 60 people - including ex servicemen and women, students and volunteers - have been involved and many have progressed through the levels of the John Muir Award.

Background to the group:

It offers an alternative therapy to engage participants with the natural world and challenge them. They explore the Norfolk, Derbyshire and Scottish countryside by walking together over six months - for the first five months they walk over 350 miles in their local area before travelling to Scotland to walk the West Highland Way and climb Ben Nevis. Throughout this time they work towards their John Muir Discovery Award and qualifications to lead other groups of walkers.

“Discovery Quest is about more than just walking, it stimulates and educates participants in conservation and environmental awareness through the John Muir Award, promotes and encourages healthier lifestyles, reduces the impact of social exclusion, actively promotes the opportunity for social interaction.”

www.discoveryquest.org



The summit of the Devil's Staircase nearing the end of their programme

They meet once a week in small groups and the walks build up over time, starting with shorter walks to help participants get used to being outside and eventually lead to an eight day camping expedition.

“Out there I’m me again”
Simon, participant

“Every Wednesday from nine till five became a break from life”
Fiona, participant

“Whatever happens to us now, for the rest of our life, however isolated or depressed our mental health may make us, our experiences in life belong to ‘before’ and ‘after’ Ben Nevis” Nicola, participant

“We took 12 people who had a variety of mental health problems on an expedition that literally changed their lives” Paul – head of the programme

Celebrating
their Awards:
Norwich
Evening News



What the Award brings to the programme:

The John Muir Award complements the programme, providing a focus to their walks and giving the project a 'set of guidelines'. Prior to using the Award Discovery Quest had not integrated environmental issues into their walks. Now relevant issues are discussed as they walk, they follow a 'leave no trace' ethos whilst walking and at the end of the day their impact and experiences are discussed during a review.

“There is increasing evidence of the beneficial effect that regular contact with nature and wild spaces can have on our physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. If the partnership between the John Muir Award and Discovery Quest can add to the wider understanding of this it can only help to raise the awareness of the value of these sites to people and the need to value and protect them” Paul – head of the programme



Loch Lomond – the start of their final 8 day walk in Scotland

The project has been highly successful, gaining widespread recognition and looks to expand in the future, spending longer in Scotland, including time in Knoydart – one of the John Muir Trust's partnerships – for a truly wilderness experience.

“The peace and the countryside helps with problems. It gives you a better outlook on life; you are not so squashed up all the time” Participant

For more information about how the John Muir Award helps people to enjoy, connect and care for wild places visit www.johnmuiraward.org

For more information about Discovery Quest visit www.discoveryquest.org