

Impact and Monitoring report

September 2023 - August 2024

Focus On: Staff Experience



1. Introduction

We previously produced biannual impact and monitoring reports, covering periods March-August/September-February. Moving forward, as a reflection of our existing portfolio of impact and monitoring evidence, the Leadership Team recommended we offer annual reporting to inform provision and organisational development.

We will continue to highlight specific areas of our provision through a '*Focus On...*' report in each 12 month period; this report considers the experiences of our staff team, their journeys to and impact within Stomping Grounds NE CIO. We will:

- Highlight 3 case studies of staff delivering provision on the ground, each focused on a different aspect which we consider to have a significant impact on our offer to clients and to our employees.
- Share the EDI profile of our staff team
- Reflect on feedback from our staff team, offering a "You said... We did..." perspective for 2024

Achievements and success

This year, we have worked with the following organisations on short and long term projects:

Gateshead Council, The National Trust, Through The Trees CIC, Prudhoe Youth Project, Active Northumberland, Tyne Derwent Way Project.

We have received funding from the following Trusts and Grant making organisations, for which we extend our thanks and gratitude:

Alpkit Foundation, TK Access Solutions Community Fund, Newcastle Your Homes, Clothworkers Foundation, Prudhoe Town Council, Awards for all (National Lottery), Community Foundation, CURTIN PARP, Uk Government (former Levelling Up department)



2 .Who is accessing our Provision?

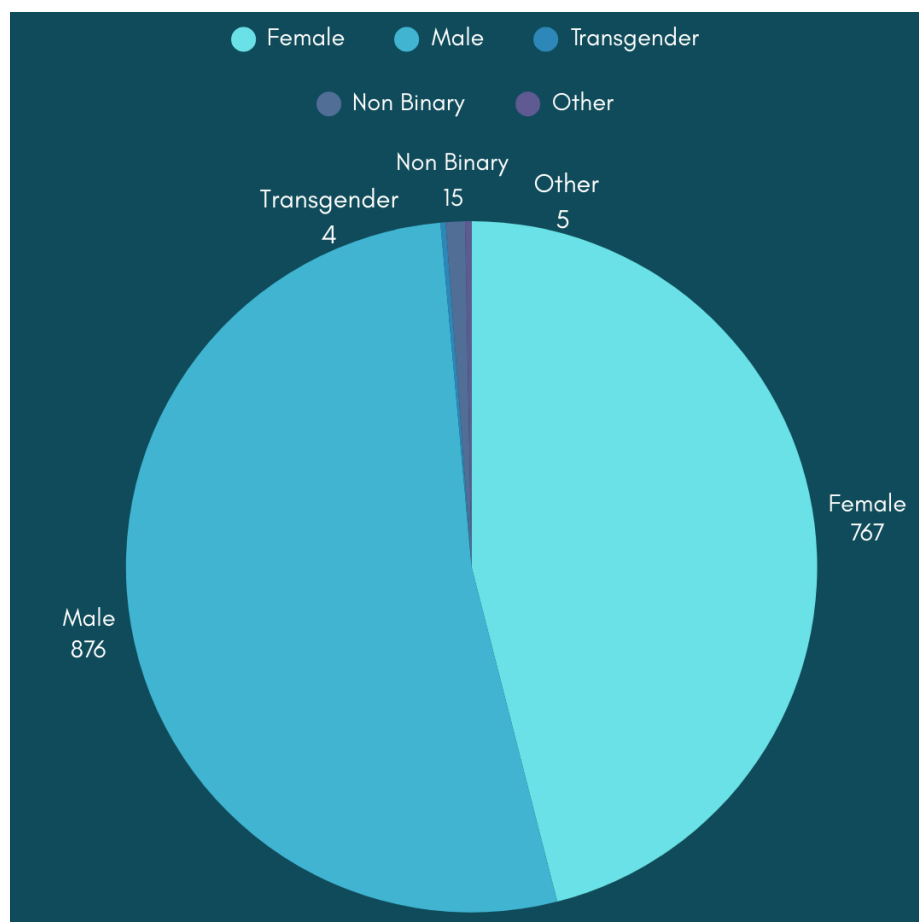
During this period we delivered:

- 6072 sessions of forest school
- Across 8 sites in the North East of England
- Reaching 1753 people

Gender:

1667 people responded to a request for gender data. Of those responses, 876 (52.55%) were Male; 767 (46.01%) female; 15 (0.9%) Non Binary; 5 (0.3%) Other; and 4 (0.24%) Transgender.

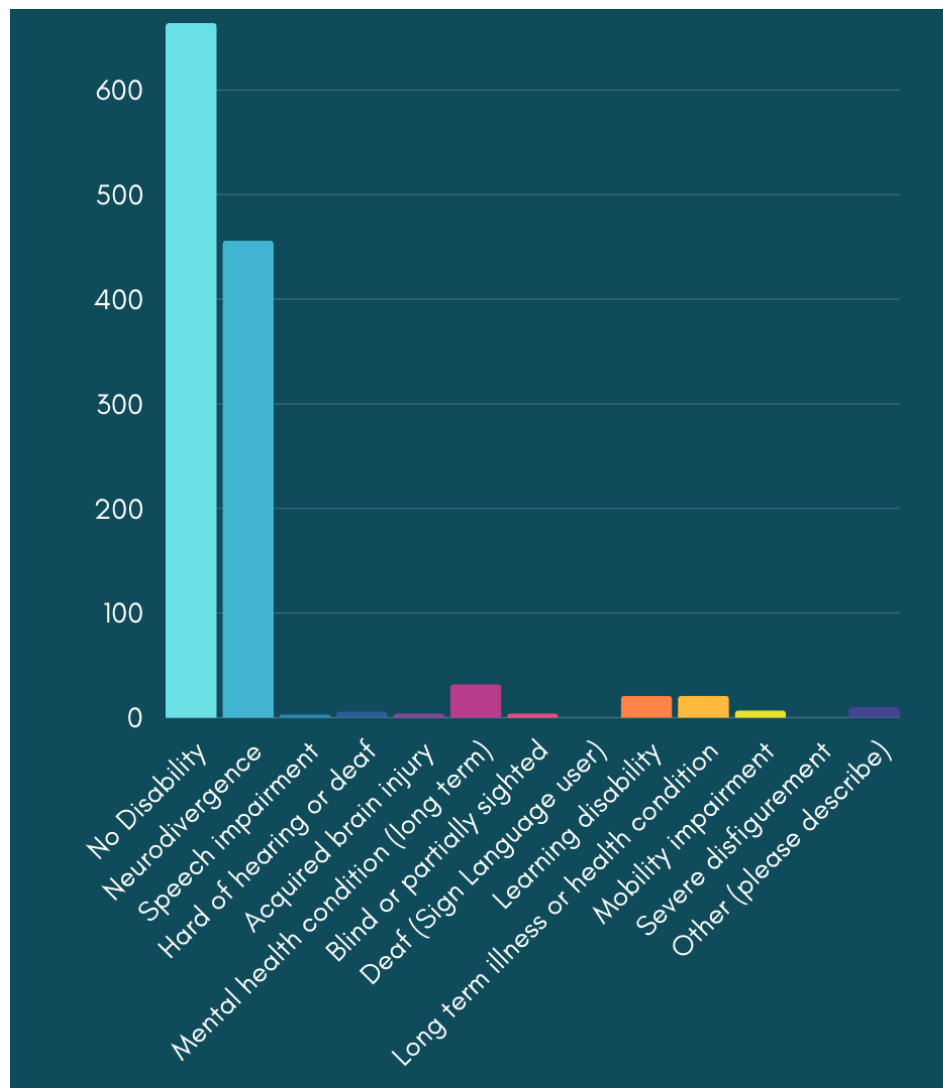
Census data shows the North East has the following population by gender: 51% female; 49% male; 5.04% other; 0.2% transgender; and 0.06% non binary (2021 Census, ONS, updated 2023).



Disability

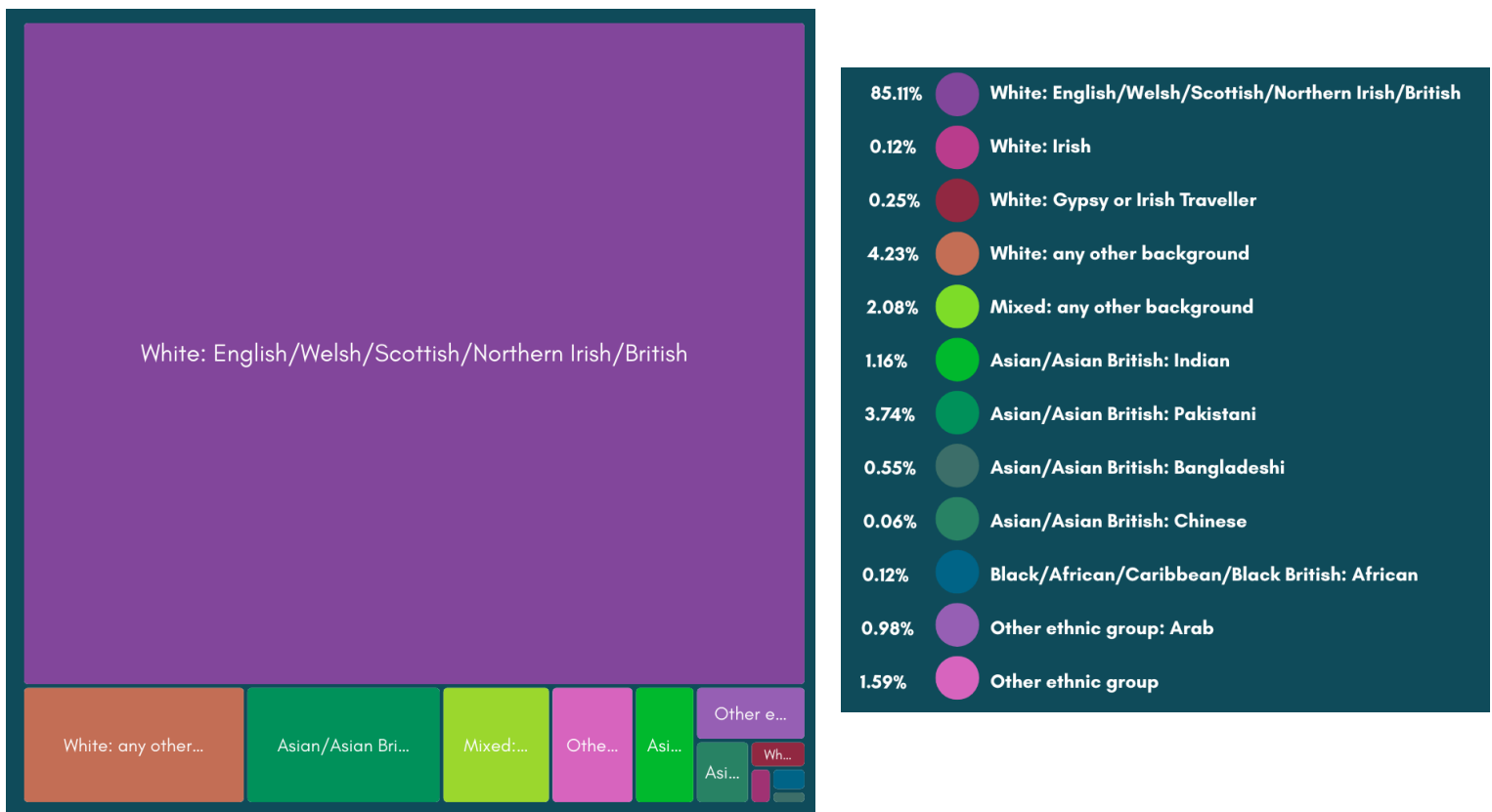
1228 people responded to a request for disability data. Of those that responded, 54% recorded a disability, with 37% of our participants identifying as neurodivergent, compared to 11.9% in our last period of evaluation.

Census data shows the North East region has the highest proportion of people living with a disability at 28.53% (2021 Census, ONS, updated 2023). We continue to demonstrate a higher than average proportion of participants living with a disability year on year.



Ethnicity

1632 people responded to our request for ethnicity data. 85.11% of those that responded were White British. Last year 90.3% of our participants recorded their ethnicity as White British. Census data shows the North East region has the highest proportion of White British people at 93% (2021 Census, ONS). We continue to demonstrate a higher than average proportion of participants from minoritised ethnic groups year on year.



Why compare against the regional population?

OUR MISSION

To give children and families from all backgrounds the time and space to connect with nature, build relationships with the land and grow communities.



EQUALITY OF ACCESS

We prioritise work to those who would most benefit, which includes those with the least access.

We want to provide a mirror into the world of the great outdoors, so that all people can see themselves in wild spaces and therefore access the benefits. This includes committing to Positive Action practices to pro-actively support historically excluded groups access our services.

Comparing engagement with our organisation with regional averages helps us to evaluate our success in achieving our Mission, and our Equity of Access value. Over representation of minoritised groups demonstrates that our lived experience, allyship and community focussed approach supports minoritised groups to access our offer.



3. Focus on: Staff Experience

“I was a primary school Teacher”

Case study 1: A journey from mainstream education to outdoor alternative provision

I think after 15 years teaching I was frustrated that I didn't seem to be helping children as much as I had been able to earlier in my career. Mainstream education was only becoming busier and busier, more and more added to the children's day; more complex work, higher and higher expectations with much less opportunities for fun and basically just being a child. I found myself pushing children beyond their comfort zones and I didn't like the type of teacher I felt I was being forced to become, one who had so little time to actually listen to a child because I was constantly aware of how much we had to get through in that day. I used to enjoy chatting with children, getting to know them, really connecting with them – towards the end of my time teaching I found myself frustrated if lesson time was taken up with this, which made me incredibly sad when I finally sat down and reflected on it.

I feel like I had a lot more autonomy earlier in my teaching career, but in the last few years there was a definite shift towards following schemes of work in all subjects. I became more of a presenter than a teacher – there was little space to use my natural approach to teaching as there was essentially a script to follow. Very little opportunity at all to follow a young person's interests or explore something that

emerged during the lesson. At SGNE we actively do that and it's a revelation to be that free to follow what feels right.

I've always wanted to be able to spend more time outdoors. She spotted an advert for Stomping Grounds on social media and we looked into it together. It seemed to offer what I was missing – opportunities to connect with young people, actually help support them and a chance to feel like I was offering an alternative to the regimented education system. I hoped that I would be able to work at a pace that the young person needed. SGNE seemed (and is) caring, people-orientated, sensible and, above all, puts young people front and centre.

In school it was a case of the children adapting to the work, gradually becoming accustomed to the expectations, whereas with SGNE we adapt to best suit the young person and where they are currently at. There always seemed to be something new, something more to be working on at school – every staff meeting, every week was another focus, another 'THIS is the important thing to focus on now'...I never felt like I was doing anything well, because I was spread so thinly. I feel like we keep the focus tight at SGNE.

Maybe it's the nature of the job, maybe it's being outdoors or many of our team living the experience of the young people we are working alongside, but there is a deeper empathy here that just wasn't there, or perhaps there wasn't time or space for, at school.

I work less hours now than I did in teaching. I am able to have most evenings off and most of the weekend, which is wonderful with a young family.

My responsibilities are less than they were in school. I was head of several subjects without being an expert in most, which led to a lot of anxiety. The day was intense and your head was spinning by the end, then you moved onto all the marking, answering the emails that had built up, planning for the next day etc etc etc. At SGNE there can be moments in the day that are very intense, heightened emotions etc which are more challenging than in school, but overall the day is not as intense.

In school, I felt like being honest meant being judged, saying I couldn't manage something was being weak/lazy. If you go from school to SGNE you get your life back, you realise how much of yourself you were giving to a system that you don't actually have much of a say in. At SGNE you can put your energy and enthusiasm towards something that will actually help others, right there and then. In school, it felt like I had to tell myself 'but this will help prepare them for life as an adult,' which

is almost embarrassing to type. Why wasn't I thinking about the young person as they were at that moment, and what they needed right then? I think the answer would be that I couldn't let myself, because if I did I would have walked out. You want to believe in the thing you are a part of, but sometimes you need to step back. It's ok to disagree, and it's ok to move on. There are other ways out there; you don't need to be in school to help a young person.

I don't regret my time as a teacher, it has helped me in so many ways and more importantly I know I have had a positive impact on a lot of young people, but I feel now like I'm having a deeper impact on a smaller scale. What I like it that all together, all of us having these little deeper impacts actually adds up to change on a pretty huge scale. I love being part of something that everyone involved believes in and that we all work together towards one goal, while supporting each other's individual needs at the same time. Bottled magic.



"I am Neurodivergent"

Case study 2: A journey to diagnosis and the significance of lived experience

I went to uni and didn't really know what I wanted to do, so I did psychology and biology, which are two interests, but completely different. Then I decided to have a career in teaching and I naively thought that I could go into the classroom and appeal to all of the young people that school wasn't great for. I thought I could change the world and then quickly realised that teaching wasn't suited for me and I couldn't be the teacher that I wanted to be. It was a terrible experience. I had a break from teaching and did something completely different and I had a child.

Then I met Sophie, who was in the early days of setting up a little forest school and she asked if I wanted to volunteer for one of our sessions and I said, I'm not interested in school, I don't like teaching anymore. She encouraged me to come along and try it out and see what it's like. So I started volunteering and I really enjoyed it. Some of the stuff that we did was in the depths of winter, in the middle of Chopwell, in the dark, and kids were turning up all the time. It was always oversubscribed and the kids absolutely loved it. There were so many challenges to it, but it was so rewarding. It was always loads of fun.

As I started to work with more challenging young people, I realised, this is the type of teaching that I've always wanted to do. In my innate curiosity and childlikeness, I was always met with frowns and people thought it was so weird when I was in a school setting, but in the woods, it's fine. Then the pandemic happened and I realised that I didn't want to be in the office of my other job. I wanted to be outside more, and that coincided with a real need for provision like ours.

I've always known that I struggled through school and always felt a bit of a misfit. I never quite felt like I had a place in different job roles, through university, through school friendships. I never felt like 100% fit, especially when I went into teaching. I knew that I wanted to do something that appealed to these kids that didn't enjoy being taught, but I wasn't sure. When I started at forest school, I started to realise that I related to the young people so much, but I didn't realise why. I didn't realise that I thrive in the woods because there's constant stimulation and constant change, constant interest but there's also no flashing lights. There's no walls and it's much quieter, it's much calmer and I didn't put those things together.

Now that I've been working with the young people that I have and seeing my similarities with them and they're much further on in their journey, they're coming to us, usually because they've been diagnosed already. Then I'm saying something like, Oh, you don't like loud noises. Do you know, I get really stressed out when there's loads of loud noises happening. I know that that young person's autistic, but I didn't know that I was autistic. Then I'm like, Oh, hang on a second, maybe that's why we get on. There were loads of little bits and pieces like that, where I was, like, that's really interesting, you didn't get on in school? Yeah, me neither. It took me so long to realise why I got on in that environment and why I got on with these young people so much. It took such a long time for those things to slot into place and I feel like I went on this journey alongside the young people. I was helping them on their journey, but I didn't realise at the time how much they were helping me.

There is so much more flexibility in the role, so much more freedom in the work that you're doing and the choice - I've got a lot more agency. I think it helps that I was good at it, as I tried so hard at teaching that I almost lost my mind. There's obviously some sort of disconnect there, where there was something completely wrong with teaching and being in school, but there's something so much more natural about working in forest school and doing the work alongside the kids that I do. I feel as if it's like some sort of parallel snake, where I've been supporting the kids, but actually, they've also been supporting me without knowing it.

After being diagnosed with ADHD, it opened up a few more doors and more information came pouring in about how my brain works, why it works like that. Then I was starting to pick up more stuff from the kids, and the kids were picking up more from me and there's a total free flow of information and similarities that I think it's really important to share with the kids and be like, I'm like you, and you're like me. Being open about my diagnosis with the kids is really eye opening for them, because they're seeing someone who's an adult and they might see me as like a teacher or any, any grown up, it's a balance of power and if they see that I also have ADHD, or I'm also autistic, they can see that they also can thrive and they can be successful. I think that's really important.

With colleagues I think it helps me to understand and be more patient with the different ways of working in the different needs of people. I can be really flexible and changeable, I thrive off that uncertainty. I thrive off constant input when I'm in the woods and constant change, but I know that there's some people that work with a rigid structure and need clarity and plenty of processing time before they either

undertake a task or do something different. Things like language and how we ask people to do things, and also how I'm asked is important. If I'm asked, I won't do it, if I'm scaffolded and given a bit of a boost before it's placed upon me, I'm much more able and willing to do it. I think that's helped in loads of different ways.

I don't feel like I was trusted in my other roles. I felt like I was micromanaged and told exactly what to do and I couldn't add myself to it or add my personality or curiosity to it, because it was almost completely controlled by what other people were asking us to do. At Stomping Grounds, within the sessions, you've got so much scope to just scooch between all the different interests and different things that the kids are doing. Within the sessions, it's up to you and the kids what you do.



“I am a Young Leader”

Case study 3: A journey from forest school participant to delivering as Young Leader

I came here in year six in school for a taster and I liked it, so my Mam put me in for a session. I liked that too. So I was around 10 at the time, yeah, and when I was 12, I started as a young leader. [This involved] More tool skills, discipline, patience, first aid and ways of problem solving.

Leaders (lead practitioners) have been helping me [so] if there's something out of my control, I go to leaders and voice when I need help.

If you're a young leader, you can you have all these different skills that you've learned throughout the training and use those to your advantage. For example, if half of the group wants to play a game and half wants to play another, you find a way of getting both those games into one game.

It releases all the stress I've had from school... I just really like being outdoors, helping people, and learning how to use things.

[A day I'd like to forget was] A day where there were a lot of younger kids and they all wanted to do different things and I was really stressed and really tired. That's probably the only bad day I have had.

[If you're considering becoming a Young Leader] They should definitely join; it's helped me a lot. You learn a lot of new things and, if they like doing outdoor stuff like at this place, they'll love it. You can expect a lot of help, a lot more patience and new skills.

I just want a job that is outdoors - that is my plan and Stomping Grounds will help me to achieve that.



Staff Pulse:

25 people completed the Staff Pulse in June 2024. These surveys are distributed twice a year to our whole staff team to ensure we check in and gather feedback from our employees on various areas, including our role and responsibilities as an employer, and our delivery as an alternative provision. We shared in depth feedback internally with our staff team; here we include highlights to illustrate where we are succeeding, where we can improve and how to achieve this.

You said...

When you have had a concern or query at work, you know who to take it to (1: I don't know to 10: I am always 100% sure)

16% said 10/10. Average score 7.8/10

We did...

We employed a full time Operations Manager in October to ensure people had the right support and leadership within their team.

We are also working on a directory to include in induction entitled “Who do I go to for what?”

You said...

When you have raised a query or concern at work, you feel that you have been heard and action has been taken (1: never, to 10: all the time)

36% said 10/10. Average score 7.68/10

We did...

We employed a full time Operations Manager to ensure people had the right support and leadership within their team.



You said...

How much does your employer support your wellbeing at work? (1: never, to 10: I feel well looked after)

36% said 10/10. Average score 8/10

We did...

We are exploring the idea of a 'new starter' profile, alongside creating profiles for existing staff, similar in style to our Young Person's Passport.

We introduced a Staff Wellbeing Representative in September.

You said...

When you have an identified development need (either self identified, or proposed by your employer), how supported do you feel in addressing this need? (1: not at all to 10: a lot)

36% said 10/10. Average score 7.24/10

We did...

We introduced a new streamlined process for appraisals and observations via the Advanced Practitioner team. All delivery staff are scheduled for an observation in 2024. All contracted staff will receive an annual appraisal and quarterly supervisions, alongside observations. Freelancers can request an appraisal too.

We ensured each member of delivery staff had a designated line manager.

You said...

How would you rate the communication between yourself and core staff? (1: poor to 10: excellent)

28% said 10/10. Average score 8/10

How would you rate the communication between yourself and delivery staff (1: poor to 10: excellent)

32% said 10/10. Average score 8.12/10

We did...

We subscribed to Google Workspace and began to record and share all team meetings.

Our Commercial Manager and CEO have begun to share headline financial information via email with the whole staff team.

We ensured that every member of staff had a central point of contact via their line manager.

You said...

When conflict has arisen at work, how well have you been able to resolve this independently? (1: I haven't experienced conflict to 10: it was resolved really well)

20% said 10/10. Average score 7.6/10

When you have been unable to resolve conflict independently, how well has the organisation/your manager supported you to resolve this conflict (1: poor to 10: excellent)

32% said 10/10. Average score 7/10

We did...

We employed a new Operations Manager in October 2024 to offer appropriate support and leadership to our teams.

We created a new Staff Wellbeing representative role to ensure opportunities were available for staff to share concerns in confidence.

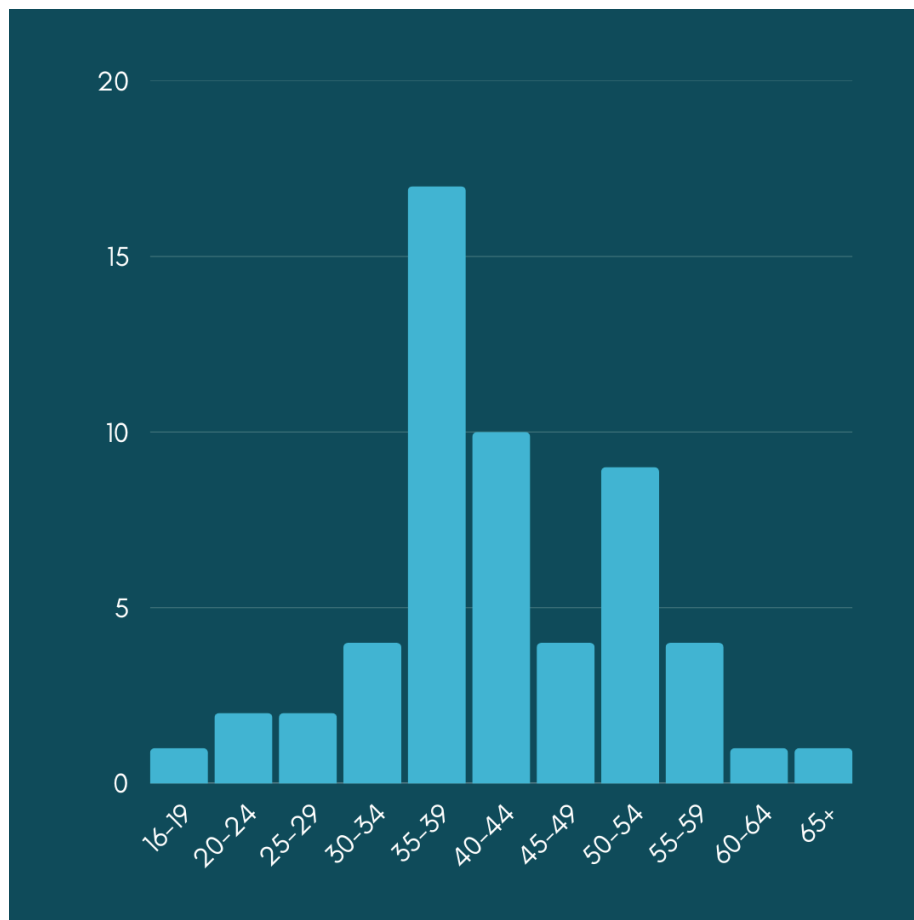
We expanded our Advanced Practitioner team to ensure all delivery staff were observed and given appraisals.



Staff team profile: Ethnicity, diversity and inclusion

We had 55 responses to our request for EDI data from our team. The responses came from core staff team, practitioners and trustees. By gathering this information, we are able to better understand how our colleagues are representative of the communities we work with, and how we can improve our representation at staff, volunteer and trustee level.

Age of staff in years:



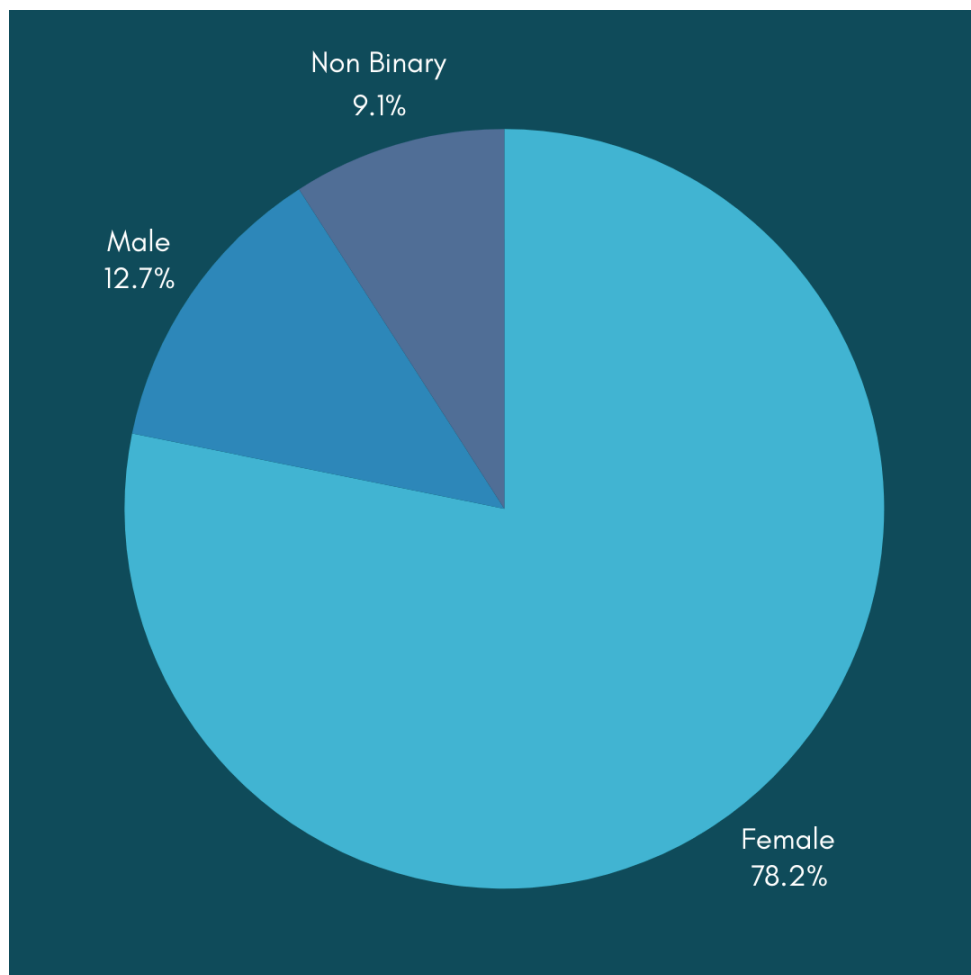
As an inclusive organisation, we value having a cross-section of staff ages, recognising that intergenerational teams bring a diversity of perspectives, communication styles, and lived experiences. We want young people to experience being alongside adults of all ages, learning that knowledge, creativity, and resilience are gained and shared at every stage of life. This dynamic not only strengthens

mentorship and peer learning but also fosters empathy, breaks down stereotypes, and helps build a workplace culture rooted in mutual respect and curiosity.

What's next?

- Consider the role of young people ages 16-29 within our workforce and how we can recruit and support them.
- Develop policies and working practices to support older employees.

Staff gender :



As an organisation we have a commitment to gender diversity and inclusivity.

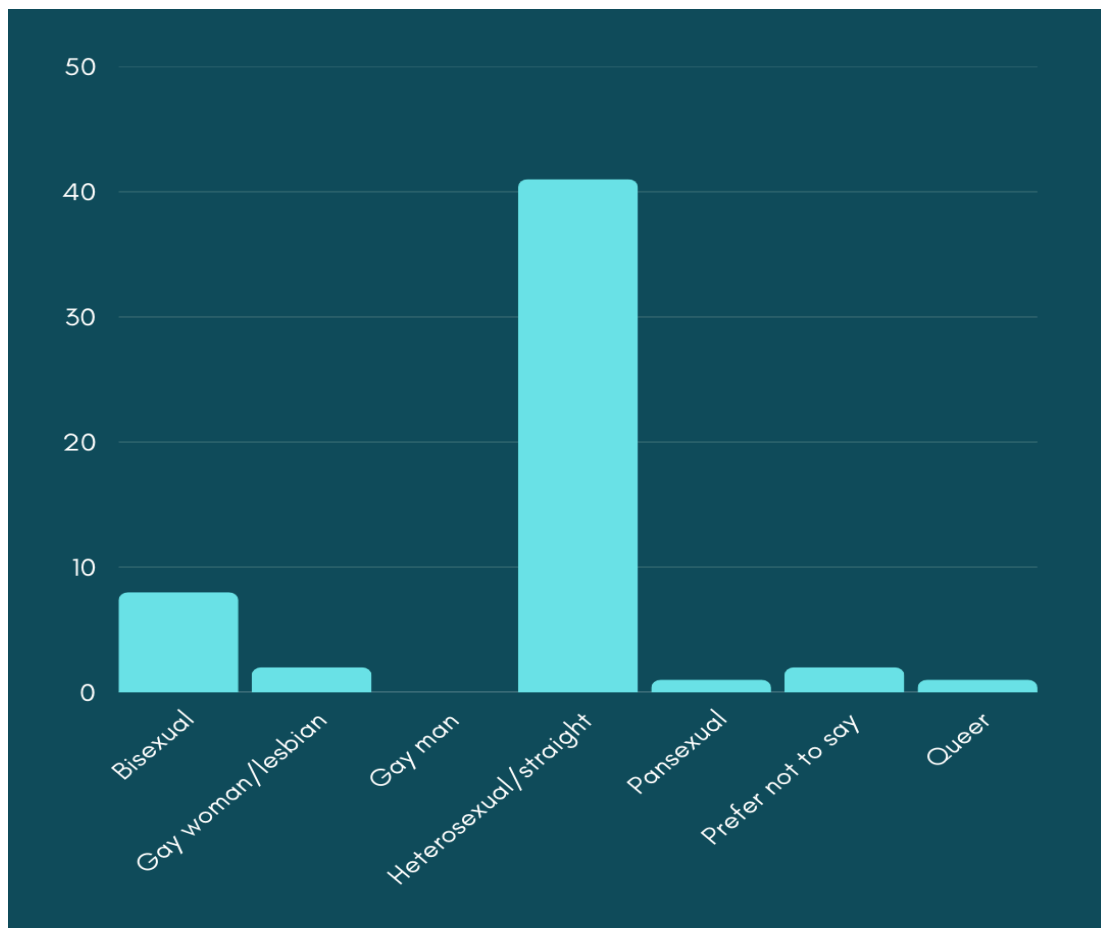
In a sector where both bushcraft and childcare have historically been gendered, this mix is positive. We will always seek to challenge traditional stereotypes and offer children positive role models across the gender spectrum.

Our organisation is female led, but as we have grown we have sought to increase diversity within our team, recognising the need for positive male role models within the education sector, and responding to an increase in misogynistic ideologies within UK schools.

What's next?

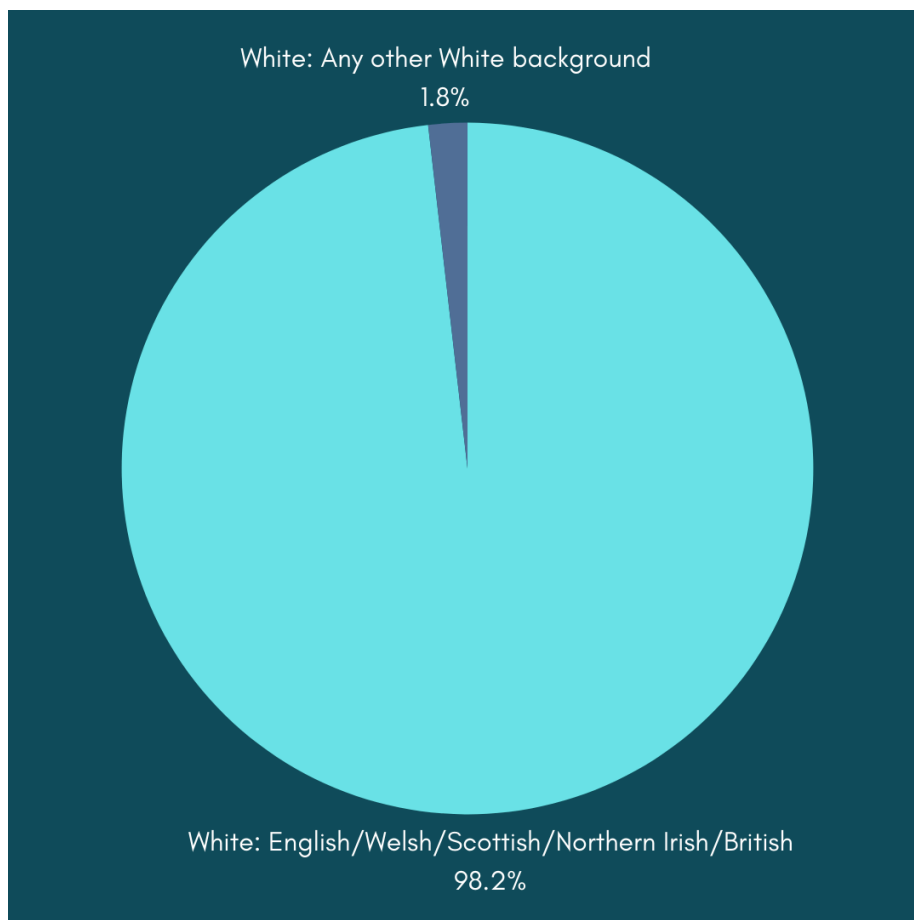
- Training and development opportunities for the whole team on challenging misogyny
- Review our recruitment practices to support further diversity within the team

Staff sexuality:



As an inclusive employer we collect data on our team's sexual identities – the responses reflect our commitment to creating an inclusive, welcoming environment for both staff and participants. At Stomping Grounds, we support many children and young people who may be exploring or questioning their own identities. Having visible LGBTQ+ representation among staff helps foster a sense of safety and belonging, and models acceptance and authenticity in a way that affirms every young person's lived experience.

Staff ethnicity:



Currently, our staff team is predominantly White British, with 1.8% identifying as other White background. While our organisation champions inclusion and equity in its practice, we recognise that our team does not yet fully reflect the ethnic diversity of the communities we aim to work alongside.

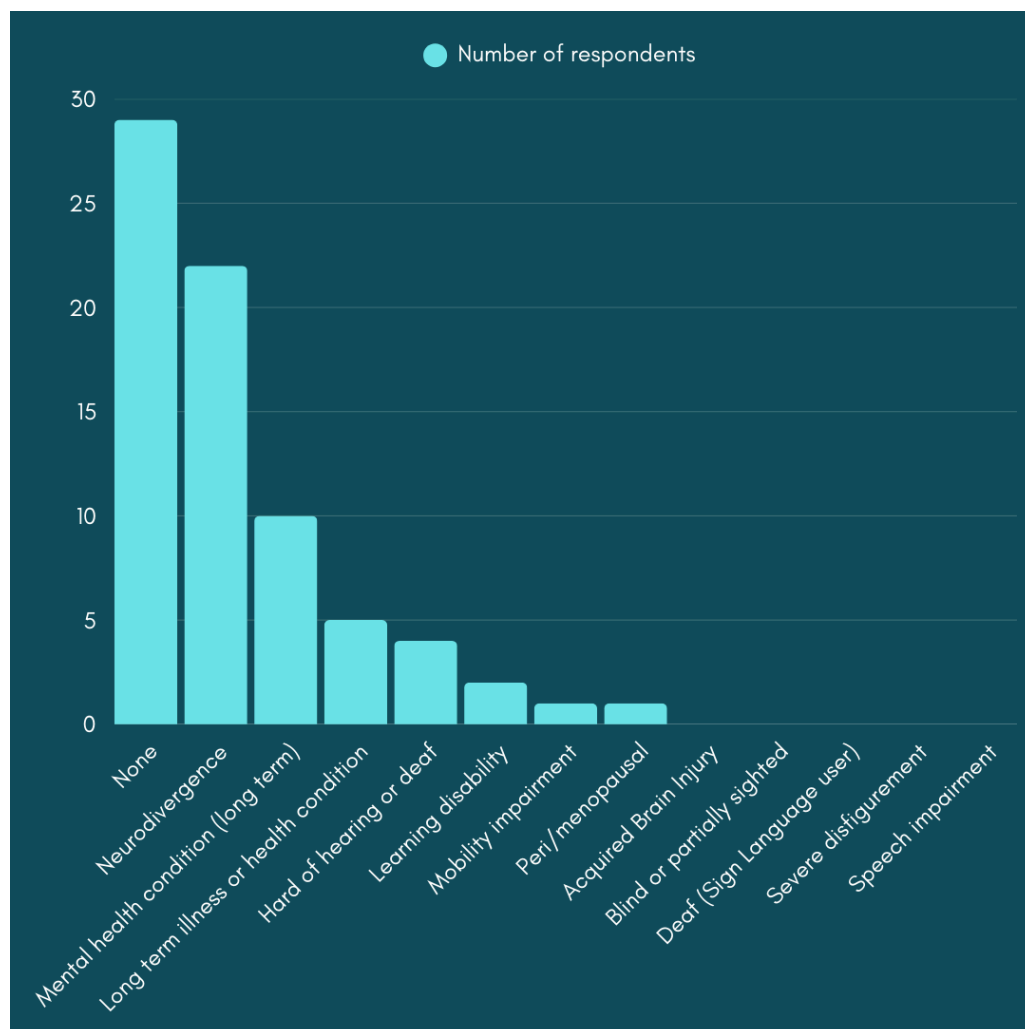
We are actively exploring strategies to address this, including targeted recruitment in more ethnically minoritised areas, and developing progression pathways from our

successful Benwell project, where we aim to train and support local volunteers into staff roles. By investing in community-led recruitment and inclusive employment practices, we hope to ensure that our team better represents the richness of the communities we work alongside, and in turn, offers more culturally responsive provision. We also recognise that representation in staff teams is an important way for young people to feel safe, recognised, understood, and empowered.

What's next?

- Review our recruitment practices to support further diversity within the team

Staff disability:



We are proud to have a diverse team with 61% of staff identifying as having a lived experience of disability or long-term condition, including 29% who are neurodivergent, and others with long-term mental health conditions, sensory, mobility, and chronic health needs. We encourage staff to disclose any aspects of their disability they feel comfortable sharing and ensure appropriate support is in place.

Through the government's Access to Work programme, we offer practical workplace adjustments and funding for support workers or equipment where needed. Lived experience, particularly of neurodivergence, is a real asset in our work, shaping the way we design sessions, train staff, and engage participants with complex needs. We actively value and centre this knowledge in our practice, seeing it not as a barrier but as a strength that enriches our therapeutic and educational approach. As an inclusive employer, we are committed to further reducing stigma, embedding flexibility, and continuing to shape a workplace where all staff feel empowered to bring their whole selves to work



4. Areas for Improvement

Objectives from Feb 2024 that have been delivered:

- Find and report regional disability data then reference it as a comparison for our data on disability
- Continue to build our portfolio of case studies for specialist provision, to reflect the diversity of participants accessing our setting.

Outstanding and ongoing objectives from Feb 2024:

- Develop and deliver a survey to collect the views of all partners we work with - what do we do well, what can we improve, what next? (see strategic plan)
- Develop a transition process for CYP leaving our setting. For example, EOTAS not granted; YP turns 16. How can SG facilitate this step?
- Find/make connections/agreement with a school in the region which will agree to a flexible schooling arrangement whereby we are offered as part of their provision
- Discuss how we collate EDI data from booking system; consider how to input data to reflect comorbid conditions and intersectionality

Recommendations to improve evaluation, provision, delivery, administration and organisation next reporting period (Sept 2024 - August 2025):

- Develop and share a 3 year strategy for the organisation to include:
 - Partnership development and how we collect their views
 - Find/make connections/agreement with a school in the region which will agree to a flexible schooling arrangement whereby we are offered as part of their provision
- Introduce a new cross organisational booking system, and design better ways of collecting and reporting on EDI data;
 - Consider additional collection and evaluation of data: postcodes, index of multiple deprivation, those with EHCP or in process, those who are care experiences.
 - Consider intersectionality and comorbid conditions
- Improve the diversity of our staff team:
 - Review our recruitment practices to support further diversity within the team
 - Training and development opportunities for the whole team on challenging misogyny

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- Consider the role of young people ages 16-29 within our workforce and how we can recruit and support them
 - Develop policies and working practices to support older employees.
 - Our next evaluation report will cover the period Sept 2024 - Aug 2025 and will explore the theme of 'Belonging'