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Pathways to Nature KA2 Project

*Improving Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing through Connecting
Young People with Nature using Youth Work Methodologies*

Training Resource for Young People



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Young People, Volunteers and Youth Workers at Metsakartano National Youth Centre, in Finland, learning about Pathways to Nature in -28 degrees!

1. What is the Pathways to Nature Project?

The 'Pathways to Nature' Erasmus+ Project is a Cooperation Partnership Project between 5 Organisations from across Europe. The aim of the Project is to improve youth mental health and wellbeing through connecting young people with nature using Youth Work methodologies.

Young people across Europe have been telling Organisations for a number of years now that there are very real mental health struggles impacting on their lives, so the Project partners decided to work with young people to see what could be done. It started very simply with the fact that in general young people feel better when they're out in nature. It seems to be widely acknowledged, but if so, why don't we just do it and then feel better? If it was that easy though, all the problems would be solved - but as with many deceptively simple answers, the reality is more nuanced.

Together with young people, Youth Workers and academics created a 2-year Project that would involve young people from each of the 4 countries involved (Ireland, Spain, Finland and Armenia) attending an innovative, co-designed Pathways to Nature Training Course built around the 5 Pathways to Nature – senses, emotions, beauty, meaning and compassion.

The young people would then design their own Nature Based Initiatives and implement them over the course of a year, together with other young people and their own local communities.

The Partners Organisations are measuring the impact of the Project on youth mental health and wellbeing, and the young people will present the results at a series of Youth Conferences to be held across Europe in late 2025. What's really interesting is that you'll be working with young people from the 4 corners of Europe – in Ireland, Finland, Spain and Armenia. And using the Erasmus+ programme, we'll get to meet them through taking part in Youth Exchanges.

The Project is running between January 2024 and December 2025, and is supported by Ireland's National Agency for Erasmus+, Léargas. The partner organisations are:

1. Waterford and South Tipperary Community Youth Service, (Waterford, Ireland)
2. University College Cork (Cork, Ireland)
3. Metsakartano National Youth Centre (Rautavaraa, Finland)
4. Asociacion Region de Murcia Limpia (Murcia, Spain)
5. InMotion Armenia (Yerevan, Armenia)

2. What is expected from you?

If and when you join the Programme, this is what we hope you would do to help yourself and others feel happy and healthy through working with nature:

- Explore Nature with Your Senses: You will spend time outside really noticing things—smelling wildflowers, listening to birds, and even going barefoot to feel the grass!
- Share Your Thoughts and Feelings: You'll learn to talk about the different emotions nature makes you feel, like joy, wonder, or even being a bit scared of the dark during a night walk
- Play and Be Creative: You will play fun games like "Tree Hugging" contests, act out "statues" with your body, and make art using things you find outside
- Work in a Team: You will meet new friends and work together to come up with big ideas. You'll learn how to listen, trust each other, and solve problems as a group
- Create Your Own Project: You and your team will get to design your own "Nature Project." You might plan a tree-planting day, a camping trip, or an art weekend
- Be a Leader: You will present your ideas to experts (kind of like on a TV show) to get "Golden Tickets" (special vouchers) to help pay for your project and make it real



Young people in Armenia taking part in the Pathways to Nature Programme

3. How do you start getting involved?

Everything starts with the Youth Work Organization that you're involved in, so talk to your Youth Worker first. He or she knows a lot about the Project, and they'll let you know what you need to think about if you'd like to take part. You'll see the contents of the Programme in the next section here as well. But the Course looks a bit like this:

1. Training Course: There'll be a National Training Course run by Youth Workers, where you'll stay away for a week with friends and other young people, learning about the 5 Pathways to Nature (senses, beauty, emotions, meaning, and compassion)

2. Create your own Nature Based Initiatives: Working in teams during the week, young people will create their own Nature Based Initiatives, which are Projects such as tree planting or nature based art work – you'll decide these for yourself.

3. Take part in 'Dragon's Den' and get your funding: You'll ask Erasmus+ for funding to make your ideas turn into reality.

4. Work on your own Nature Projects: After that, for however long it takes, you'll work with your friends in your communities doing whatever you said you were going to do.

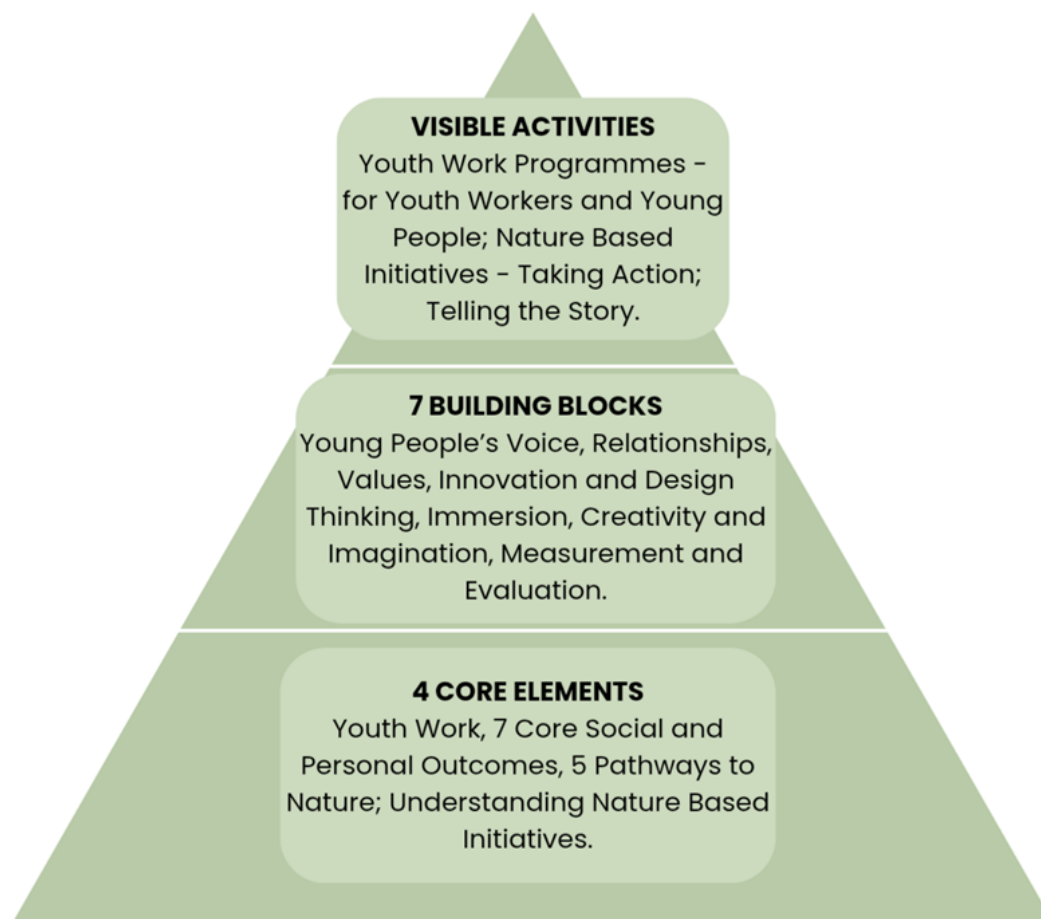
5. Tell Your Story: Finally, you'll tell the story of your Nature Based Initiative at a Youth Participation Conference, through videos or photos or speeches – any way you decide yourself.



Using the 'blanket game' to get to know each other at Woodstown

4. What's it all about?

The whole Project is built up like a Pyramid (like in ancient Egypt) and we call this the Programme Pyramid. It looks like this:



1. The 4 Core Elements (The Base of the Pyramid)

These are the most important "bricks" at the bottom that hold everything up.

- 1) **Youth Work:** Young people and adults working together in small groups in 'planned, informal education'.
- 2) **7 Core Personal and Social Outcomes of Youth Work:** Learning things like how to talk with others, solve problems, and believe in yourself.
- 3) **5 Pathways to Nature:** Using your senses, finding beauty, feeling emotions, uncovering meaning, and being compassionate to nature.
- 4) **Nature Based Initiatives:** Coming up with real-life ideas to help the environment.

2. The 7 Building Blocks (The Middle of the Pyramid)

These are the ideas used to make the project fun and interesting for everyone.

- 1) **Young People's Voice:** Making sure adults actually listen to your ideas.
- 2) **Relationships:** Making friends and building trust so everyone feels safe and happy.
- 3) **Values:** Learning about what's important to you so that you can make good decisions about how you live your life.
- 4) **Innovation and Design Thinking:** Developing new ideas and putting them into action.
- 5) **Immersion:** Really being in and feeling nature.
- 6) **Creativity and Imagination:** Using art, music, or play to dream up big things.
- 7) **Measurement and Evaluation:** Finding out what the impact of the Project will be.

3. Visible Activities (The Top of the Pyramid)

This is the part everyone sees—the actual "doing".

- 1) **Youth Work Programme – with Youth Workers and with young people:** These are the Training Programmes firstly for Youth Workers and then for the young people. This is all about learning how the project works through fun sessions.
- 2) **Nature Based Initiatives (NBIs) – Taking Action:** This is the best part! You get to plan and carry out a real project using "Golden Tickets" (real money) to pay for it.
- 3) **Telling the Story:** You'll decide how to share what you did with your community through videos, photos, or a big conference!



Young people presenting their plans for a Nature Based Initiative

5. What happens next?

If the Pathways to Nature Project sounds like it might be something that you're interested in, then please talk to your Youth Workers. They'll be able to explain what's involved and what we're doing all around Europe.

There are over 60 young people involved already from the 4 countries (Ireland, Finland, Spain and Armenia), and these young people are working with hundreds more young people in their own communities in each country.

The main aim of the Project is to improve youth mental health and wellbeing through connecting young people with nature using youth work methodologies.

We're looking for young people who want to make a real difference in their communities and in their own lives, so please take that first step, and join in.



Young people exploring a 'Pathway to Nature'

If either you or your parents/guardians would like any more information, then please email pathwaystonature@gmail.com, or get in touch with any of the Organisations involved:

- Ireland – [Waterford and South Tipperary Community Youth Service](#)
- Ireland - [University College Cork](#)
- Finland – [Metsakartano National Youth Centre](#)
- Spain – [Asociación Region de Murcia Limpia](#)
- Armenia – [InMotion Armenia](#)



Young people reflecting in the sunshine on the learnings from the Project



