



FOREST-BASED CARE

case study

ECOWELLNESS CONSULTING

Ecowellness Consulting Ltd. (Formerly Nature, Health & Wellbeing Ireland) is a "Profit for Purpose" business with a strong focus on achieving social, community and environmental benefits.

"As people become increasingly disconnected from nature, they forget why the natural environment is so important. We do not protect what we don't love or value. International evidence shows that people with a strong nature connection are more likely to engage in pro environmental behaviours. Our main aim is to support the reconnection of people to nature by reintroducing them to the immense beauty, awe and wonder that is sometimes forgotten or overlooked since childhood."

Shirley Gleeson

MODEL IN A NUTSHELL

- **Website**
www.ecowellnessconsulting.com
- **Social channels**
[linkedin.com/in/Shirley-Gleeson-Ecowellness-Consulting](https://www.linkedin.com/in/Shirley-Gleeson-Ecowellness-Consulting)
[instagram.com/forestbathingireland](https://www.instagram.com/forestbathingireland)
- **Country**
Ireland
- **Contact us through Alliance**
greenforcare.eu/joining4c/ecowellness-consulting-ltd/
- **Main sector**
Private
- **Specific sector**
Health and wellness, eco and forest therapy and bathing
- **Stage of development**
Incorporated
- **Our work in SDGs**



FROM FEW TO MANY

I have a background in **social work and health promotion** and have worked for 20 years in public, private and the voluntary sectors in the areas of mental health, disabilities and medical social work in hospitals. I have always seen how nature supported people in times of grief and difficulty and I have always brought children and adults into nature or used elements of nature in my work. About 12 years ago I went to South Africa and trained as a nature guide. Then in 2014 I trained as a Forest Therapy Guide in the US. When I got back to Europe, I became the **first person trained in Forest therapy in Europe**. In 2015 I set up Nature, Health & Wellbeing Ireland as a sole trader and in 2019 I incorporated it as a Limited Company and changed the name to **Ecowellness Consulting**.

As a graduate of **Social Entrepreneurs Ireland in 2018**; my work was accelerated, I received mentoring, and advice through the early years of conception. In addition to this, the Local Enterprise Office in Dublin, a couple of nature-based businesses in Ireland and specialised contractors supported my work from the start. Nowadays, I have two close advisors who I contract, although they cannot be considered full time employees. I also sub-contract to other professionals as required (research psychologist, ecologists and foresters) to undertake some projects if I am not available.

The beneficiaries of my services are a wide range of **individuals and groups that benefit from eco-social work for stress relief, mental health promotion and treatment, occupational health**. I also work with vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers. Some of the work can be also classified as high-end work -I work in the area of global leadership and nature-based wellbeing. This work is well paid so this enables me to subsidise my programmes for individuals and groups with reduced income.



FROM IDEA TO ACTION

Having worked for 20 years in private-public voluntary work on the topics of mental health, disabilities, medical social work in hospitals. I always saw how **nature supported people** in times of grief and difficulty. I saw how it benefitted children and hospital patients of chronic illnesses such as cancer. The general lack of access and initiative to nature for these groups of vulnerable people frustrated me. So I got trained up and started consulting, and the natural evolution was to start the consulting organization.

Ecowellness Consulting designs, delivers, and evaluates nature-based interventions to **promote and enhance positive mental health**. It is a one-person initiative that relies on subcontractors and networks.

Its key activities include more direct interaction with final beneficiaries through different training, events and courses. In my activities the rights of nature have a central focus - the activities are organized with as little impact on nature as possible.

Although public funding is increasing, the main source for my income is private payments for my consulting activities. I use **public and private forests** for my activities and depending on the type of forest ownership, I acquire specific permits for their use.

The impact of my work is captured by the work of the people that I train and mentor, media coverage in Ireland about my work and forest-based care in general, awareness raising and direct personal experiences with the participants. In short, such impacts can be summarised as **improved wellness and mental health, an increased connection with nature** and an **increased capacity and knowledge of this connection and the associated health and wellness benefits**.

FROM OLD TO NEW

The innovation and success of Ecowellness Consulting lies in its **multi-functional and integrated approach**. I focus not only on forest therapy but also on eco-therapy, nature based expressive arts, nature-based well-being, nature-based interventions for positive mental health (a training aimed at health professionals) and combinations of these. I integrate different practices and adapt them to the specific request and context. The activities and their design differ based on the needs of the participants. Indeed, you could say that I **connect social work with environmental awareness and conservation**.

FROM NOW TO THEN

My vision for the future is to **design nature-based interventions** with more time, attention and focus on improving the quality of the interventions even further for specific populations. The initiation and participation in the network of nature-based intervention businesses in Ireland is also a future vision.

Ecowellness Consulting currently needs more staff members for support, greater awareness about the services and nature-based interventions, and support with coordinated evidence gathering and research.

