



FOREST-BASED CARE

case study

FOREST THERAPY INSTITUTE

The Forest Therapy Institute (FTI) is a "profit for purpose" institute whose mission is to achieve social and environmental benefits. Its training is the combination of the latest cutting-edge research on forests and human health, international nature connection practices, science and ancient wisdom traditions.

"For us within FTI the impact is not about the number of people trained, but what they do afterwards. It is about the direct impact of the people that we train. For example, one graduate set up the first healing forest, the other a nature hub that offers forest-therapy intervention for mental health, another offers nature therapy intervention. For us it is important to keep continuous support for the trainees and help them to become self-reliant and economically sustainable. We have not yet captured the numeric value of the impact. But we know that it has been very impactful"

Shirley Gleeson & Alex Gesse

MODEL IN A NUTSHELL

- **Website**
foresttherapyinstitute.com
- **Social channels**
facebook.com/foresttherapyinstitute
instagram.com/foresttherapyinstitute
linkedin.com/company/foresttherapyinstitute
- **Country**
International, Europe-based
- **Main sector**
Private
- **Specific sector**
Health, education, social care, forest therapy and bathing
- **Stage of development**
Incorporated
- **Our work in SDGs**



FROM FEW TO MANY

We (Alex and Shirley) met in 2016 when both of us were involved in another training organization. At that time they wanted to focus on integration of forest bathing and forest therapy into the health care systems and evidence-based practices and this was not the focus of that organisation. So, we decided to create **our own training institute in 2019**. From this, the necessity grew to build and keep continuous support through continuous professional development of our network of beneficiaries, the trainees, after the training is over. Up to now, the institute has trained around **300 Forest Bathing Guides and Forest Therapy Practitioners from around 30 countries**. The beneficiaries come from healthcare, research and educational, municipalities and local governments, eco-tourism, social service, environmental protection, corporate well-being and other sectors.

In addition, we also have a range of partners in partnerships within EU-funded projects.

Besides us (as executive directors), there are also **4 staff members, 18 trainers and mentors, 12 local representatives** in different countries such as Chile, Italy, Spain, Ireland, England, Portugal, Belgium, Denmark, Poland, Lithuania, France, and Scotland.



FROM IDEA TO ACTION

It all started from us coming together and brainstorming on **integrating forest bathing and forest therapy into the health care systems** and getting the evidence bases to do so, we also realised there was a lack of coherency and quality among the many different offers of forest therapy and bathing on the market, so we wanted to do something about this.

FTI is a "**profit for purpose**" business with a social and environmental focus and is uniquely positioned to meet interested parties requirements for professional trainings and to offer business support to FTI professional network. We can also describe it as **a new generation organization**: our network members take over certain responsibilities and go after implementing them.

At the moment our main activities involve **training** professional forest bathing guides & forest therapy practitioners, **conducting and promoting** innovative projects and research on the specific FTI method (Walk Structure & 5 X 5 Model) and **creating a solid network** of partnerships and raising awareness.

Up to now, our financial sustainability is mostly (about 90%) coming from revenues from our **private clients** paying for our services. We have a small portion (the remainder) of the business now extending into **grant funding** (European grants mainly). Indeed, this is an area we would like to keep going, and even grow in the future as it would mean we can offer more training, keep the diversity and be part of projects with a more direct impact on wider society.

More recently, we have started to capture **our impact** through;

- Number of trainings conducted (or number of trainees) and what they are doing in their own countries with that training, e.g, setting up businesses
- Testimonials
- Partnerships
- Impact on media by promoting Green Care - regular interviews, awareness raising (presence in 50-70 different newspapers)
- Walk reviews, questionnaires, surveys after each training.

FROM OLD TO NEW

We created FTI from our need for quality benchmarking in the field of forest bathing and forest therapy to promote them as legitimate health interventions. FTI adheres to the high standards of education, competency and professionalism for the integration of the practices into health care systems. **The rights of nature** are central to FTI activities. Since the beginning we based the initiative on an ethics code which was quite innovative. FTI aims to make the training **inclusive and accessible to all**. The fees we asked for participating in annual conferences and summits organized by FTI are donated for nature conservation.

Our FTI trainers conduct forest bathing and therapy in 2 versions- **nature immersion and blended online** (images or visualization). For nature immersion, urban and rural forests, but also other green spaces such as botanical gardens and nature reserves, are used. The participants of the activities organized by FTI alumni are diverse and can belong to different categories such as victims of domestic violence, veterans, emergency services personnel, people with occupational stress, people with mental health problems, etc.

FROM NOW TO THEN

Good network, engagement in innovative public and private sector projects, and skilled members are the main resources of our organization. At the moment we'd need more people with mixed skillsets (different backgrounds, social workers, psychologists, cultural background), good external advisors, close media engagement and people with the knowledge of different tax and legal systems across world.

In the future, FTI aims to **consolidate and build on the quality** that has been created to offer more high-quality trainings and CPD- continuous professional developments.

Complex legal & policy frameworks, limited awareness on practice and benefits of forest bathing & forest therapy, lack of networks for guides and practitioner's business development, individuals and companies offering trainings with limited expertise and quality can be described as our major challenges. While growing interest in Green Care internationally and training markets becoming open to developing a range of nature-based products are important opportunities to move forward.

