

A Year in Nature:

an art project with
East Sussex carers







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arts in nature
project with
East Sussex
Carers
2025

Photos by Alison Cotton unless otherwise stated

Inside front cover: painting by Leanne

about Care for the Carers

Care for the Carers is the leading charity supporting unpaid carers in East Sussex. Our aim is to work with carers until all East Sussex carers have recognition, choices, influence and access to quality support and services that they need and want. Our role is to support carers through services including direct support, groups, social and wellbeing activities, counselling and an information and carers' voices network. Last year we supported over 11,500 carers across the county.

www.cftc.org.uk

about Alison Cotton

I am an inclusive artist and therapeutic practitioner, based in Sussex. I work with community groups to give people access to the countryside and nature-based art.

A preoccupation with landscape through walking and climbing has remained a constant throughout my life, inspiring work with photography, film, painting and print. I have worked as a tree surgeon, and recently trained as a therapeutic counsellor.

In 2023 I was chosen by carers to be Care for the Carers Artist in Residence, and the Arts in Nature Project was conceived. This took over a year to become a reality, and we are so grateful to the High Weald National Landscape and the John Jackson Charitable Trust for providing the funds to make it happen.

alisoncotton.com

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About the Arts in Nature Project

by Alison Cotton

Throughout my life I have been lucky to work and play outdoors. Studying Inclusive Arts Practice provided a way for me to share some of these experiences with others through creativity. This means collaborating with people who may have less access to the creative process, and who experience isolation or social marginalisation.

Unpaid, family and friend carers face complex circumstances that make it harder to take time out for themselves, and spending time in nature might be daunting.

During this project we worked to provide a safe, supportive and enjoyable way for carers to dip in to some new experiences, such as learning to make a basket out of bramble stems, or using acrylics to paint the sea. Crucially, we wanted to create time and space to take a break from caring.

Some of these activities might have felt difficult for carers to access before, but thanks to our funders we were able to provide



a range of exciting, hands-on, creative experiences in some really beautiful settings, at no cost to participants. Carers were invited to join a friendly group of peers, artists, makers, and facilitators, with whom to share the experience, learn together, and share their story, laughter, or just some peace and quiet.

We have all learned together, and I have been fortunate to find out more about this very important group of people – carers – who provide an incalculable service to society and are often undervalued and overlooked.

This project has brought home to me the actual, tangible benefits of spending time in the more-than-human world, and of creativity. I have been able to see and feel the transformation taking place in those around me, in the course of a few hours spent in the woods, for example, whilst absorbed in making something with one's hands. At best this can amount to a system re-set, allowing a person to forget all about their responsibilities for a while, then return to them replenished.



Generous funding from the **Lund Trust and High Weald National Landscape Partnership** allowed us to run project activities, locating them within the rich and fascinating landscape of the High Weald.

The **John Jackson Charitable Trust** kindly enabled additional sessions in the Eastbourne area of the South Downs and Sussex coast.

We are also grateful to Peter and Jilly Burnet for the use of Pennybridge Farm in the High Weald as a painting location.

The project offered carers a range of creative techniques, not only to enjoy time in beautiful natural spaces, but also to understand some of their history.



The following artists, makers and facilitators joined us to share their skills and knowledge with both adult and young carers:

Alison Cotton, artist in residence for Arts in Nature: landscape painting in the Weald and by the sea.

Francis and Pam Gimblett, founders of Wild Weald: traditional practices of the Weald, including charcoal burning, foraged basketmaking, ceramics, fermentation and food foraging and production.

Louise Gorst, artist and art teacher: monoprinting and mindful walking in the Weald and South Downs.

Dominic Parrette, basket maker and teacher at Sussex Willow: traditional and contemporary willow working techniques in the Weald.

Lucy Goffin, textile designer and maker: creative stitch in the Weald and by the sea.

Rachel Grimes, artist and florist: festive wreath making in the Weald.

Foreword

Jennifer Twist, Chief Executive at Care for the Carers

I am proud to share with you this very special publication. This book is a result of the third project of Care for the Carers' Artist in Residence Programme: Arts in Nature.

The project was chosen by unpaid carers in East Sussex, from a number of proposals from local artists and practitioners. It was made possible thanks to the generous support of High Weald National Landscape and John Jackson Charitable Trust, who understood the importance of supporting carers to take a break to step away from daily challenges and immerse themselves in arts and nature.

Such breaks, however small, are often described by carers as a lifeline. Being with other people who understand your life as a carer. Not being judged for how you feel, or if you turn up late or unprepared. Being offered a cuppa. Gaining the tools to learn new

things and have new experiences. All of these are invaluable, and we are indebted to our funders for making the project possible.

Arts in Nature welcomed over 80 carers to a series of workshops in 2025. We explored the beautiful High Weald landscape and the open spaces in and around Eastbourne. Carers immersed themselves in art forms such as basket weaving, charcoal making, ceramics, print making and floristry. Many carers were new to these techniques, some rediscovered a creative passion they had before their caring journey. All told us that these sessions gave them respite in their lives at a time when they needed it the most.

Our sincere thanks go to Alison Cotton, the lead practitioner who facilitated this project with so much skill, sensitivity and understanding, impacting carers' lives as an artist and as a human.



March & April

Making charcoal









"We were so lucky with the weather blessing us and our surroundings in the gorgeous woodland, with the wood anemones greeting us like little stars, the peace and tranquility and our wonderful, kind and thoughtful hosts."

Feedback from adult carer

"Splatting the mud was good for getting the anger out."

"It made me feel like a child again."

Feedback from young carers









May

**Bramble
basket
making
and
wild
ceramics
for young
carers**



"It was a beautiful day which helped me to feel calm and relaxed, I learnt a wonderful new skill and I am really pleased I attended.

The trainers were very kind and knowledgeable. I loved the friendly atmosphere and that everyone ate lunch together, it was social without being too overwhelming. The basket making itself was a really mindful and soothing activity.

Being in nature all day and not thinking about anything else was really special, and the setting at Wild Weald was magical."

Feedback from carer



"It was a delightful gem of a day – the birdsong, the dappled sunlight, the campfire, a delicious lunch and the connected time with others creating together."

Feedback from carer







Pam and I at Wild Weald were delighted to take part in the Arts in Nature project, creating a range of events for carers and young carers that allowed a sense of respite for them, within our woodland.

In order to create a sense of community through communication between carers, we provided meaningful activity where outcomes would be achieved in groups.

Carers also had time to share experiences and develop connections between activities, and over lunch.

At the core of each event was a sense of play. We were able to introduce unknowns, in the form of experimental archaeology, that would create a sense of intrigue so that guests felt they were sharing a unique experience.

Francis Gimblett, co-founder at Wild Weald



June

Monoprinting
with natural
materials and
working with
willow







and not quality the company
Branigan said that the
control restrictions. The
reasons that airlines
delays that counts as ex
circumstances beyond t
if they can prove that th
they have to pay any co
That was as far as I cou
cannot remember when or
why what was done because
I remember an
up as I'm sure many peo

JAMIE BOYS
may using the street.

...and you'd get trapped in
ly litigation lasting years.
Mr Woolton
may have been done, but
it's remedial building
cannot remember when or
why what was done because
I remember an
up as I'm sure many peo



I'm an artist and art teacher, also offering Mindfulness workshops and walks, so the invitation to take part in this project fell very comfortably in my lap.

The session started with a short meditation, then we took a gentle walk to look, smell, listen and see the offerings of the natural world and gather some leaves and foliage. The afternoon was spent exploring the process of

Monoprinting – inking up plates with different coloured inks, drawing into these inks as well as printing directly from the textures of the plants. The participants were able to focus on a creative activity at the same time as connecting and chatting with each other. Both sessions were very enjoyable and the results were beautiful and inspiring!

Louise Gorst, artist and art teacher





Cara



Over the course of two willow workshops, I worked with 14 carers from the Arts in Nature project who brought a range of weaving experience and plenty of enthusiasm for a day of making. Projects ranged from woven platters and swallows to large willow spheres and conical plant supports.

The quality of work produced was excellent but more importantly I think, was the dedicated time for creativity, chat, learning new skills, good food and laughter.

Dominic Parrette,
Sussex Willow





As soon as I arrived and sat down and looked at the view, and the stillness around me, I realised how to just be in the moment here, and that I was in need of complete quiet, which presented itself here. My stress levels fuelled by cortisol seemed to fall away and I realised how much I needed this peace.

Feedback from carer



July

Watercolour
painting





Painting by Seerché





August

Foragers' Feast
for young carers









Painting by Olga



September

Watercolour painting and working with willow

"Today was one of the most nurturing and relaxing days of connection with nature, people, and my creative side."

Feedback from carer





It has been a really tough time for us recently and I have been feeling so overwhelmed with it all. These sessions have been a real highlight to look forward to. I literally turned up in tears from an especially difficult morning and left laughing.

I've enjoyed meeting new people and even making some lasting friendships. It's been great to learn new skills and have new experiences. It can't be overestimated the importance of having sessions like these for people in similar situations to get together without judgement.

Sometimes being a carer can be very lonely and coming to groups like these can make all the difference."

Feedback from carer



October

Creative stitch
by the sea and
wild fermentation





The Art in Nature project has been a new teaching experience for me and a privilege to take part.

I provided two creative stitch workshops looking at nature and the landscape around us. We used a geological map to bring awareness to the ground we stand on here in the South East.

Carers took full advantage of having a day to be creative, immersing themselves in the process, from initial sketches and note taking, to experimentation with the medium of fabric collage and creative stitch.

As I witnessed them share stories, I noticed how the valuable activity seemed to renew depleted energy.

It has been inspiring to share my skills during this special project, and I am full of admiration for carers. Thank you to everyone involved.

Lucy Goffin,
textile designer
and maker













November

Painting the sea,
creative stitch
in the Weald and
monoprinting
with natural
materials

Painting by Nicki





Painting by Ellie





Photograph by Erica Smith





A calm, safe, peaceful, supportive environment. Welcoming, friendly people who are encouraging. Able to sketch, sew and share food and drink as a collective, moving around freely. Sharing skills and learning from each other. A space to talk or be quiet without judgement. A chance to develop and be creative.

Feedback from carer



















December

Festive
wreath
making



I have been involved with Care for the Carers for several years. I provided festive wreath making workshops in the High Weald area for the Arts in Nature Project. The workshops were full, and some attendees have returned from previous years. It is always a delight to share this simple but effective craft with the participants – everyone enjoys themselves and there is always an atmosphere of complete absorption in the activity that fills the space with a shared sense of purpose and satisfaction! It's lovely to help others connect with their surroundings, the time of year, and to simply offer a moment of respite and creative relief for those who give so much to so many.

Rachel Grimes,
artist and florist

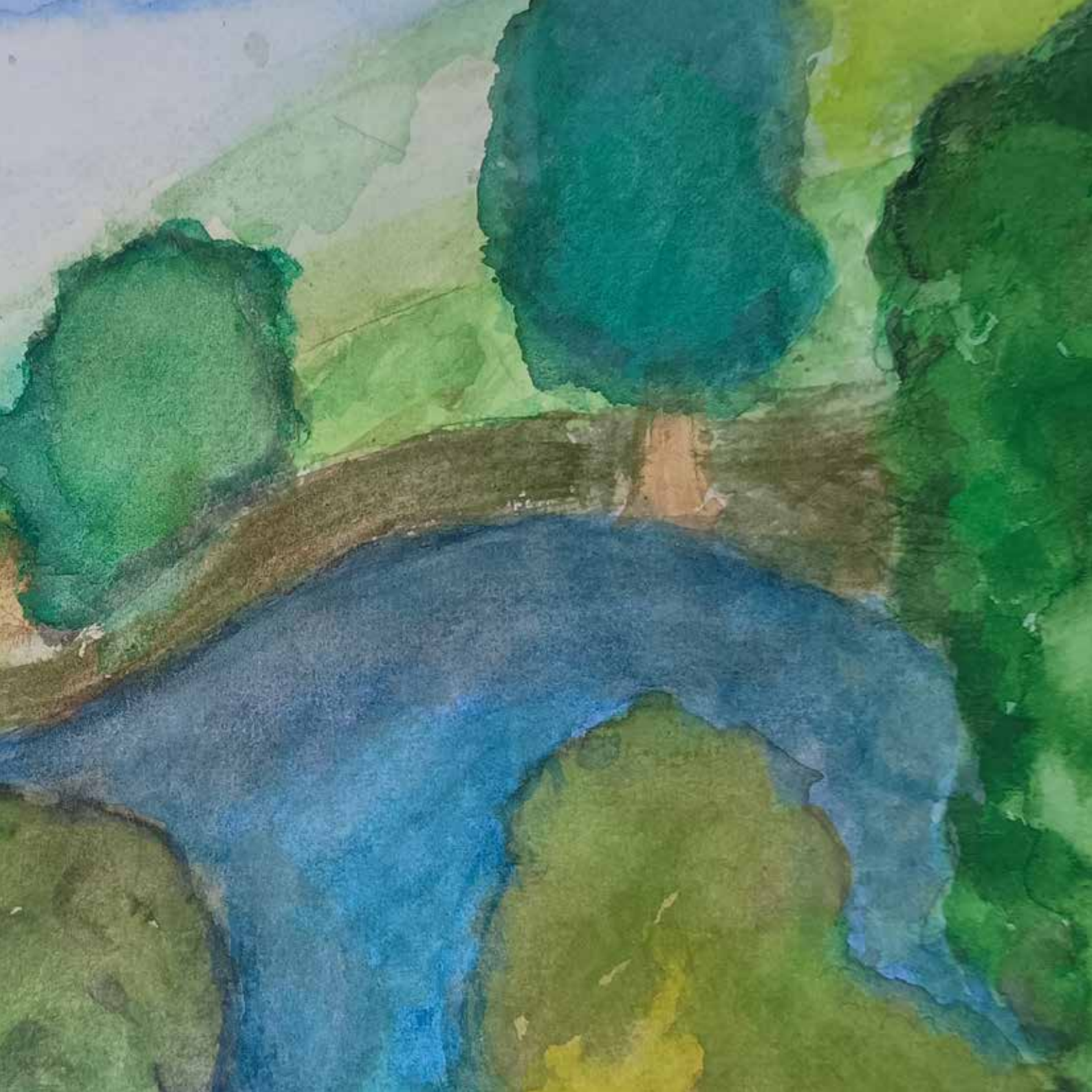


It was so wonderful to take a break from my day to day trudge and create something beautiful... I have only had support since April when my daughter, who I cared for turned 18, I have experienced more help, support and kindness in the last eight months then I thought was even possible, after many years of struggling alone, with no support and very little understanding. You have no idea how much Care for the Carers has changed my life and my daughters' lives.

Feedback from carer

Painting by Seerché





"Today was one of the most nurturing and relaxing days of connection with nature, people, and my creative side."

This book is a result of the third project of Care for the Carers' Artist in Residence Programme: Arts in Nature. The project was chosen by unpaid, family and friend carers in East Sussex, from a number of proposals from local artists and practitioners.

Arts in Nature welcomed over 80 carers to 17 workshops in 2025. We explored the beautiful High Weald landscape and the open spaces in and around Eastbourne. Carers were invited to join a friendly group of peers, artists, makers, and facilitators, with whom to share the experience, learn together, and share their story, laughter, or just some peace and quiet. Carers immersed themselves in art forms such as basket weaving, charcoal making, ceramics, print making, landscape painting, and floristry.

We want to thank the funders, The Lund Trust and High Weald National Landscape Partnership and John Jackson Charitable Trust for their generous support, without whom this project would not have been possible. They understood the importance of supporting carers to take a break from daily challenges and immerse themselves in arts and nature.

