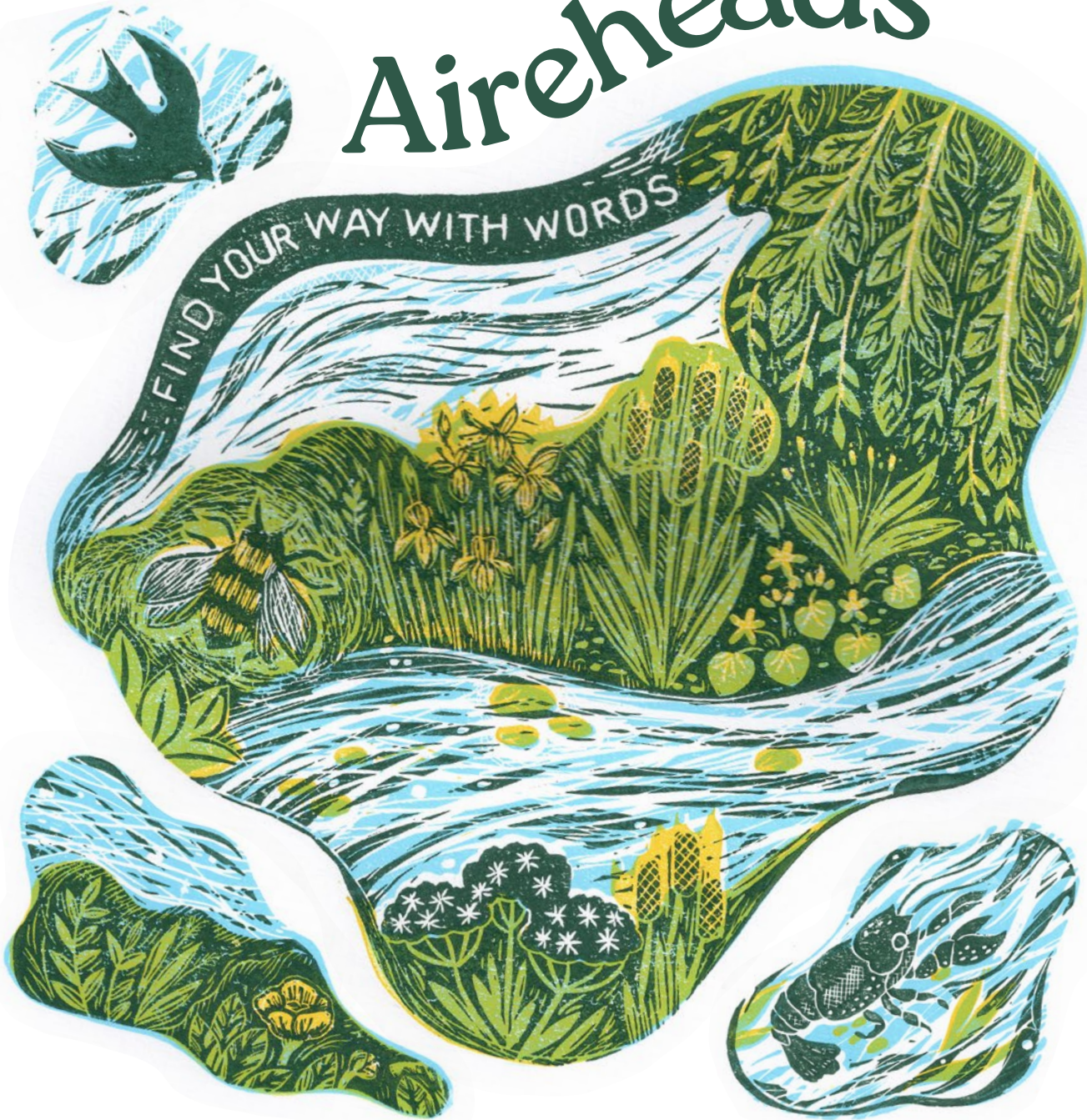


# Aireheads





**Aireheads** is an Arts Council funded engagement project produced by Word Up North and delivered in partnership with the BBC Contains Strong Language Festival and Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture.

Word Up North is a Yorkshire-based arts charity with a mission to raise up voices, stories and writers in the north. You can find out more at [wordupnorth.org.uk](http://wordupnorth.org.uk)

Extracts on page 8 © Kate Fox, 2025

**WORD UP  
NORTH**

**BBC CONTAINS  
STRONG  
LANGUAGE**



**BRADFORD 2025**  
UK City of Culture



LOTTERY FUNDED



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

# Welcome to Aireheads

— a celebration of poetry, nature  
and wellbeing across Bradford.

**This project brought together three professional poets and three Bradford-based, nature-focused organisations to explore the powerful connection between words and the natural world.**

Our **Aireheads** poets spent the summer of 2025 in community green spaces, taking part in walks, nature and gardening activities, workshops and creative sessions. Together, they explored how being outdoors and expressing ourselves through words can support positive mental health, spark creativity and strengthen our sense of community.

In this booklet, you'll find reflections and practical exercises inspired by those collaborations. We hope it encourages you to seek out your own local green spaces and discover how poetry and writing can help you connect more deeply with nature – and with yourself.

Wherever you are on your creative or wellbeing journey, we invite you to become an Airehead with us: step outside, take a deep breath and explore...

## Meet our poets

We invited three poets with an interest in connecting to the natural world to join us on this journey. Each poet spent time walking alongside Bradford community groups and services that specialise in making the most of community green spaces, meeting the people that use them and exploring how words and the urban wilderness connect.



**Andy Craven-Griffiths** is a writer and performer based in Leeds. He has performed poetry and run poetry workshops across the UK and internationally. He currently teaches at Leeds Arts University.



**Wilko Wilkes** is an alternative rapper, music producer and workshop facilitator from Bingley, West Yorkshire. A skilled wordsmith and mental health advocate, his genre-bending music has earned plaudits for its intricate lyricism, sharp wit and raw honesty.



**Kate Fox** is a Bradford-born stand-up poet, spoken word artist and broadcaster. She has made two comedy series for Radio 4, been Poet in Residence for the Glastonbury Festival and the Great North Run, and completed a PhD in stand-up comedy.

# Green Therapy

The Green Therapy Project,  
Bradford District Care, NHS Foundation Trust

In June 2025, I spent a week with Bradford NHS mental health team. I took part in nature walks, litter picking, a bioblitz, a canal boat ride, forest bathing, kayaking and joined allotment groups. Along the way, I ran poetry workshops. My mission was to explore the connection between nature, writing and positive mental health. I learnt that the physical and therapeutic benefits of green and blue spaces are beyond anything I'd realised, and also that the type of attention that we give to natural spaces is often the same type of attention we use when writing poetry.

Most of us know that walking is good for our hearts and that sunshine boosts our mood, but I never knew before that the fractal patterns in plants can reduce stress and improve focus, or that flowing and splashing water creates negative air ions that raise energy levels by increasing oxygen flow to the brain, or that breathing in the chemicals released by plants and trees can boost the immune system and lower blood pressure.

Beyond these benefits, having a common purpose seemed to help build a sense of community. It didn't matter whether a particular group was planting seeds, picking up cigarette butts, or identifying and counting butterflies for a biodiversity survey, conversation flowed more as we spent more time together. We were connected by the activity, and conversation then connected us to parts of each other that went beyond the activity, including everything from favourite Yorkshire-based rappers to tips on protecting rhinos from poachers. Sometimes, the things people knew about our natural surroundings – what 'cuckoo spit' is, why holly leaves aren't always spiky, or that yellow lilies indicate deeper water than white lilies – connected us more strongly back to the activity.

During the forest bathing session, we walked very slowly through Hirst Wood. For me, the more still I became, the more everything else seemed to move. This slowed-down, careful noticing is what I came to understand nature activities and poetry to have in common. In my workshops, I asked people to focus on specific physical details. Writing these details made us notice them more, noticing them more closely allowed us to write them better. This way, the smell of the wild roses becomes an amplified Turkish delight in both our noses and our poems. The petrol-blue-green of demoiselle damselflies becomes more vivid. The white noise of water crashing through locks becomes more textured.

The poetry workshop I ran with the Fell Lane Allotment group was the moment in which this connection between writing and nature connectedness was clearest. The poem opposite was written communally, with everyone contributing a line or two each. Why not try writing your own version? While you're at it, why not go litter picking like I now do on dog walks, or else plant something and see it grow, or go forest bathing. After all, getting more connected to nature is good for your physical health, your mental wellbeing, and can even boost creativity!

Andy Craven-Griffiths

## A Sense of Nature

The brightness of the blue sky when I wake.  
The comfort of the rustling trees.  
The squelch of a strawberry underfoot.  
The touch of sand on my toes.  
The changing colours of the leaves making me feel alive.  
The smell of honeysuckle.  
The bright red dome of a ladybird.  
The jingle of people laughing in the park.  
The taste of banana sandwiches.  
The hoot of an owl.  
The crash of a thunderstorm.  
The saltiness of the sea air on my tongue.  
The sight of vegetables growing at the allotment.  
The warm sensation of summer sun on my face.  
The feel of the soft, black soil.  
The taste of garden-grown peppermint tea.  
The liquid burble of an invisible skylark.  
The smell of lavender and roses.  
Fresh air when it's mixed with dry, clean washing.  
The view of the un-potable wilderness  
through the hole in my cheese plant

a poem by the Fell Lane  
Allotment group

“I look forward  
to seeing the  
different people  
and sharing our  
experiences, it  
means the world  
to me.”

Fell Lane Allotment  
service user



### Grow a poem...

1. Pay attention to the natural space you are in.
2. Write down a list of five things you can sense. For instance “the sight of...”, “the smell of...” etc. Use whichever senses you prefer.
3. Try to exchange a few of the sense words like “sight” and “sound” for more specific words like “brightness” or “rumble”.
4. Rearrange the lines to make an order you like.
5. Read aloud and enjoy!

# Park Wood

## Friends of Park Wood, Keighley

When I think about my time with Friends of Park Wood (FoPW) it makes me emotional. This Aireheads project has meant a lot to me and softened me as a person. The brief itself was a beautiful concept, to marry poetry and creative writing with nature and people. I have a history of mental health turmoil and writing has helped me immeasurably. It's why I do what I do, to try and ensure that other people have writing as a tool to turn to when times get tough. It's a powerful thing when you can arm people with the written word.

Then there's nature itself and the people tending to it. Park Wood is an unwieldy behemoth of wildlife that appears to be plonked between Parkwood and Long Lee in Keighley, but in fact it's the other way round. The wood has been growing and changing long before we were here. It contains many mysteries that are slowly unfolding and/or being preserved. It is an inspiring and overwhelming place of solace, sanctuary and wonder. Nobody knows this more than the FoPW. I love nature but it also intimidates me and I'm no expert in its ways. This project has certainly helped me unlock new levels of appreciation and knowledge.

What I can bring to the table is the poetry side, the joy of writing for writing's sake and sharing that with others. Along this project I attended meetings, group woodland management sessions, a sensory walk and a summer social. I interviewed members, challenged them to write poetry, wrote my own haikus based on our conversations, produced an audio piece with the sounds of the wood and voices of the FoPW, and deep-dived into Park Wood and everything it means.

There have been numerous moments I was humbled, from when I took a fall on an exploratory run around the wood, to when Ken's wife Evelyn told me he'd never finished a poem before this project, and now he was going back and finishing old poems he'd abandoned.

Reflecting on the mental health side of things, it's clear that the wood is an important pillar of the lives of FoPW members. The wood gives so much and the members pour so much into the wood. They are sensitive and vulnerable, as we all are, and they use their time and skills to make the world a better place. And for me, when you really boil it down, that's what poetry is all about too. Stepping out of the comfort zone and into the unknown, shedding ego in search of connection, encouraging others through leading by example, hoping for a better, kinder, easier world. We might not always get there, but all we can do is try.

If we can keep working together, clipping those branches and tidying up the litter, tending to the wild wood in our minds, writing and reflecting, appreciating and taking a minute to stop and smell the beech trees, we can all grow and change with time.

Wilko Wilkes

## Park Wood Nature's Home

Early in the day I enter Park Wood from Dale View top.  
Trees of the wood march down the steep incline.  
The noble beech trees rise up towards the sky,  
their lofty limbs majestically like gothic arms in a  
cathedral, sweep the blue grey of the sky.

The cobbled path winds its way down the hill towards the town,  
through the magnificent flora of Alder, Beech, Birch, Hazel,  
Oak, Rowan, Sycamore, Scots Pine and Willow.  
Countless different ground plants and saplings find their home along  
with many creatures, both large and small, Ants to Deer.

Walking through the woods a healing experience  
Hearing the birds and perhaps seeing a deer, rejuvenates us.  
Walking up the cobbled path sometimes passing a walker and their dog.  
Some will give a friendly wave or nod and the dog give us a lick.  
We are all on a journey onwards through the wood  
Wherever it takes us.

a poem by Ken R Smith,  
Friends of Park Wood member

“I've known the wood  
for so many years  
and it's formed a  
different purpose at  
different parts of my  
life. It's a sanctuary.”

Friends of Park Wood member



### Find your sanctuary...

Pick a place that you go to regularly and write a poem about it. Next time you are at that place, take a look around for inspiration, notice the things you may have always ignored, think about how you feel when you're there, think about not just your perspective on the place, but also what the place would say about you.

Your poem doesn't have to rhyme, it doesn't even have to be any good, just make sure you finish it. Try not to overthink it, keep writing and the rest will take care of itself.

# Shine, West Bowling

Gardening Group, St Stephen's Church

***We are in the storytelling circle,  
a space where people know they will be heard.  
Richard's passing with a wheelbarrow of weeds,  
Andy's chopping, Ian's holding the end of the log  
someone's whistling, there's a thrush, a blackbird,  
a Mum's brought her girls  
and their little white dog,  
says it's peaceful here,  
an escape from the grey city outside...***

I don't really want to talk about all the ways that nature is useful to us humans. How a green space can calm people's nervous systems and improve their mental wellbeing and be somewhere they can exercise and improve their physical health; though of course these things are palpably true. You only have to walk through the carefully cultivated garden space surrounding St Stephen's church to see people visibly taking big, deep breaths, looking relieved to be here, feeling a sense of refuge from the streets outside where social problems and economic scarcity are evident. Here there is everything you'd need, here is a place to feel complete.

But asking what nature can do "for us" – as if we as humans are separate from it – seems to be what has led to us extracting value from it to the point that ecosystems are dying, the climate is disastrously changing and many humans are anxious, depressed and struggling.

What I found at Shine, West Bowling in the few hours I spent with the gardening group, was a sense of people feeling connected to each other and connected to the place they were in. They could point to a plant they'd helped grow, a bed they'd weeded, an artwork they'd contributed to and feel that they were part of something bigger than themselves. Above all they were connected to the community that existed as part of Shine which is underpinned by values of love and care for each other. People are understood as seeds to be nurtured so they can flourish over time. That's heard in the lads teasing each other, in the honesty of the men's group, in the arts and crafts activities taking place at big tables and the communal lunches of baked potatoes.

I sensed that as a poet in this space, my role wasn't to break the flow of purposeful activity. Just to ask poetic questions like "If you were a plant or a tree, what would you be and why?" and to leave behind a poem which one participant said made him feel seen: "We just get on with what we're doing and don't always realise what the impact is". Poetry is a perfect form for green spaces; It holds the beauty and colour that take us out of the everyday like the flowers that so many of the group loved, but can also do some of the work of being a safe space where people can reflect on continuing processes of growth in a way that helps reinforce change – just like the garden itself.

***This space reflects  
the best we can be,  
in community with this sanctuary in the city  
carrying it with us, softened  
against the forces which would harden,  
sowing more seeds, becoming gardener  
and garden.***

Kate Fox

## Church Poem

A Place that feels like home.  
Which is a place you can escape.  
And think about all the bad mistakes.  
As you step in a place full of a world with peace.  
You can feel the good spirits taking all the discomfort away.  
A place that fosters a sense of calmness  
which can make you feel free  
and sit back and relax  
and take those scary thoughts back  
looking at the physical world  
with green trees and smells like fresh cut flowers  
this is a place that feels so serene  
and you can get those thoughts of power  
which make you feel unstoppable  
and that means anything you imagine is possible.

a poem by Kali, a participant  
at Shine, West Bowling



“The enjoyment and mental wellbeing of doing something like this is good. At the moment I struggle with mental health quite a lot and coming here really does help.”

Shine Gardening Club member

### Take a moment...

**Ask:**

If you were a plant, flower or tree, what would you be and why?

**Now add more detail:**

How near to other plants are you? How fully grown are you? What season is it? What would you like people to say to you or do for you to help you flourish? What would your plant care label say?

# With thanks

**We are very grateful to have partnered with three incredible organisations to deliver this project. You can find out more about them and how you can get involved in their work here:**

## The Green Therapy Project, Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust

Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust provide award winning mental health services throughout the district. We work with service users in various ways and in different settings including via our Community Mental Health Teams.

The Green Therapy Project is an innovative partnership between Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust and Natural England as part of their nature recovery project. The aim is to look at nature connection and how it can be used to support and help people with their mental health and wellbeing whilst supporting local habitats and encouraging sustainability.

The project runs sessions and activities that use natural settings and nature-based activities, working with service users and staff across Bradford and Craven.

To find out more about the project please contact Joseph Courtney, Green Therapy Project Development Officer by e-mailing: [joseph.courtney@bdct.nhs.uk](mailto:joseph.courtney@bdct.nhs.uk)

## Friends of Park Wood

Park Wood is located south of the Aire valley, on the east side of Keighley and is open to all. Rising steeply from the valley floor to the highest point at almost 220m, the wood has commanding views over Keighley and the Aire valley and is visible from much of Keighley town centre.

Our Friends group consists of local residents who get involved in activities, meetings or conservation work to help maintain and improve the wood for the enjoyment of the public. We are always looking for new people to get involved in the many activities we organise.

To find out more about visiting the wood or getting involved with the Friends of Park Wood group visit: [park-wood.co.uk](http://park-wood.co.uk)

## Shine, West Bowling

Shine is a busy one-stop hub in West Bowling, Bradford, that seeks to help people find a brighter future. Operating out of St Stephen's Church we aim to help everyone who lives in the area to join in our activities or access help.

The gardening club is free and open to anyone regardless of experience. Our beautiful garden has been developed over many years by the whole community and offers a space for everyone to enjoy. The changing seasons offer many different garden jobs and opportunities to learn new skills whilst meeting others from our community.

To find out more about the gardening club and other community activities Shine offer visit: [shinewestbowling.org.uk](http://shinewestbowling.org.uk)



# Find out more

For more information on accessing and getting involved with your local community green spaces and getting support with your mental health visit:

## Bradford District Parks

[bradforddistrictparks.org](http://bradforddistrictparks.org)

## Grow Bradford

[growbradford.org.uk](http://growbradford.org.uk)

## Healthy Minds

[healthyminds.services](http://healthyminds.services)

## Connecting with Nature in Bradford District

[itsoninbradford.co.uk/collections/  
connecting-with-nature-in-bradford-  
district/](http://itsoninbradford.co.uk/collections/connecting-with-nature-in-bradford-district/)

## Bradford District & Craven MIND

[mindinbradford.org.uk](http://mindinbradford.org.uk)

You can also speak to your GP about the social prescribing options in your area and signposting you to nature-based activities and community groups or offers local to you.

## Bradford 2025, UK City of Culture - Creative Health Projects

In collaboration with local healthcare partners including Bradford District and Craven Health and Care partnership, Bradford District & Craven MIND, the VCS Alliance and Bradford Metropolitan District Council, Bradford 2025 is taking part in a pioneering approach to improve both physical and mental health in our region.

As one of the largest social prescribing initiatives of its kind within a single local authority and City of Culture, we are supporting a wide range of organisations and projects, from art therapy and singing to nature connection and woodworking. If you have any questions about the Creative Health programme get in touch by e-mailing: [creativehealth@bradford2025.co.uk](mailto:creativehealth@bradford2025.co.uk)






# Are you an **Airehead?**

If you love exploring nature and the power of words, then you just might be!

This booklet shares inspiring adventures in green spaces in Bradford and creative prompts to get you thinking about how you can connect more deeply with nature – and yourself.



This booklet was produced by Word Up North in partnership with the BBC Contains Strong Language Festival and Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture, supported by funding from Arts Council England.

**WORD UP  
NORTH**

**BBC CONTAINS  
STRONG  
LANGUAGE**

 **BRADFORD 2025**  
UK City of Culture

 **ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**  
LOTTERY FUNDED

Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**