

# Writing Tree Project

Dr Sarah Douglass  
and  
Gwyn Lewis





Shinrin-yoku, or forest bathing, is an immersive nature experience developed in Japan. With increasing evidence for the benefits of shinrin-yoku, the Japanese government now includes it as a treatment within its health system. Our nature sessions were based on this approach

The creative writing sessions built on the experience in the forest, with a focus on reflecting on the time spent in nature and telling stories

Spending time in nature is beneficial for both physical and mental health

Research has shown the benefits of nature in health outcomes, recovery and general wellbeing. Studies have shown that nature-based activities can reduce blood pressure, lower cortisol (stress hormone) levels and improve concentration and memory.

Certain trees also release chemicals, called phytoncides, which have been found to boost the immune system

The sessions were for parents, to spend time as a couple with their baby (0-12 months). The sessions were designed to improve well-being and to help develop a closer link to nature and their baby.

The sessions allowed time together with their baby and as a couple and to take some time for themselves to focus on their own well-being

The nature sessions were led by Dr Sarah Douglass, Principle Clinical Psychologist and supported by Sarah Prothero, Assistant Psychologist.

The writing sessions were led by Gwyn Lewis, a Creative Writing PhD student at Cardiff University.

*'As a father who struggled with mental health following the birth of my eldest daughter, I know the benefits of mindfulness and engaging in creative writing. I hope Writing Tree can help new parents who may be similarly struggling'*

The nature sessions involved two 1.5-hour Saturday morning sessions with mindful exercises engaging the senses during a calm walk in the woods. The creative writing sessions immediately followed the nature sessions in a café in the forest and optional on-line drop-in sessions were offered to participants to work on their writing.

Outcome measures were completed pre and post to evaluate the effectiveness of the project.

# OUTCOME DATA

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Use three  
words to  
describe  
yourself as a  
parent

Before:

**anxious** attentive caring cheerful  
comforting depressed encouraging loving neurotic patient

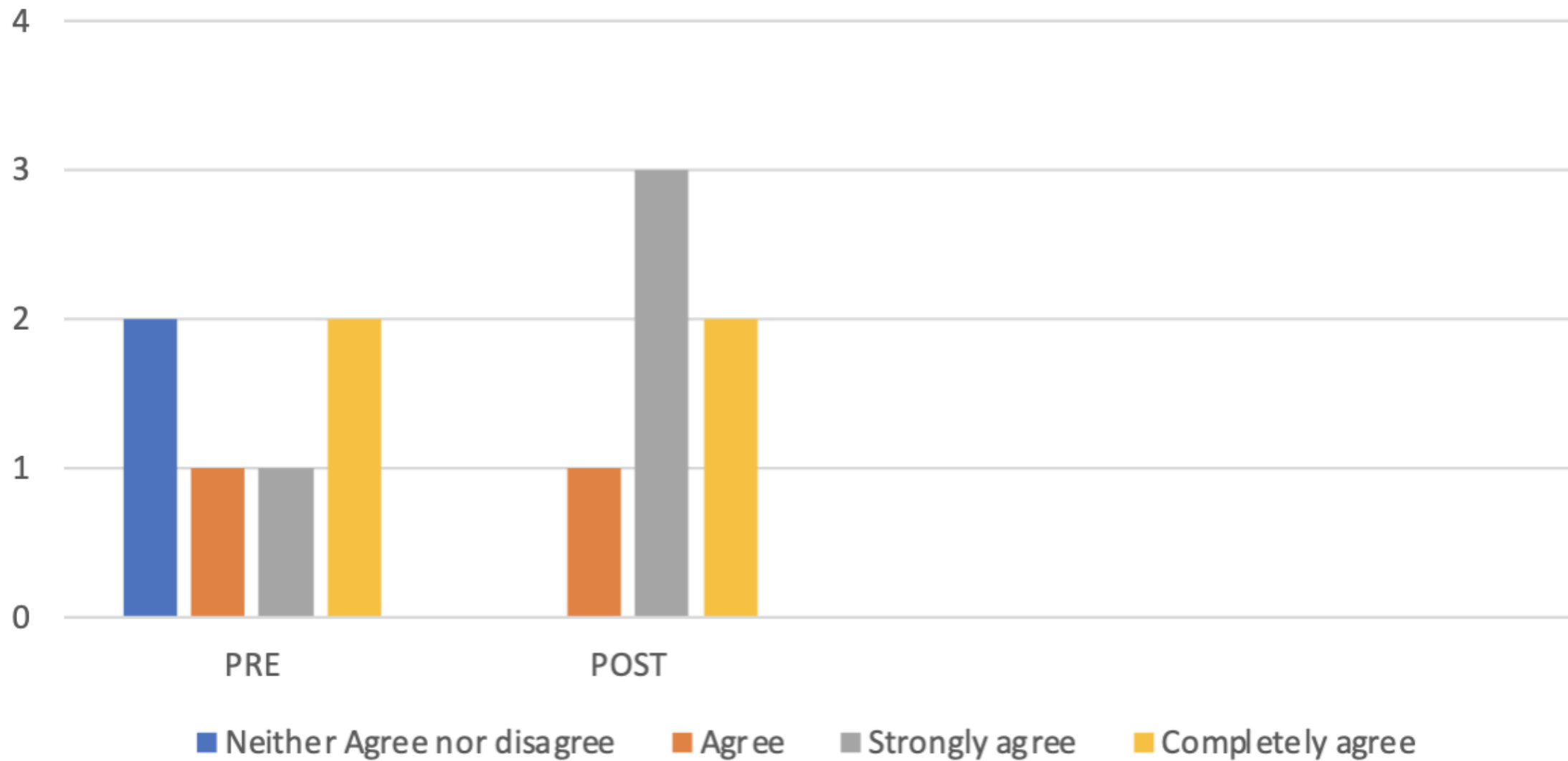
After:

attentive caring climbing-frame dedicated encouraging enthusiastic

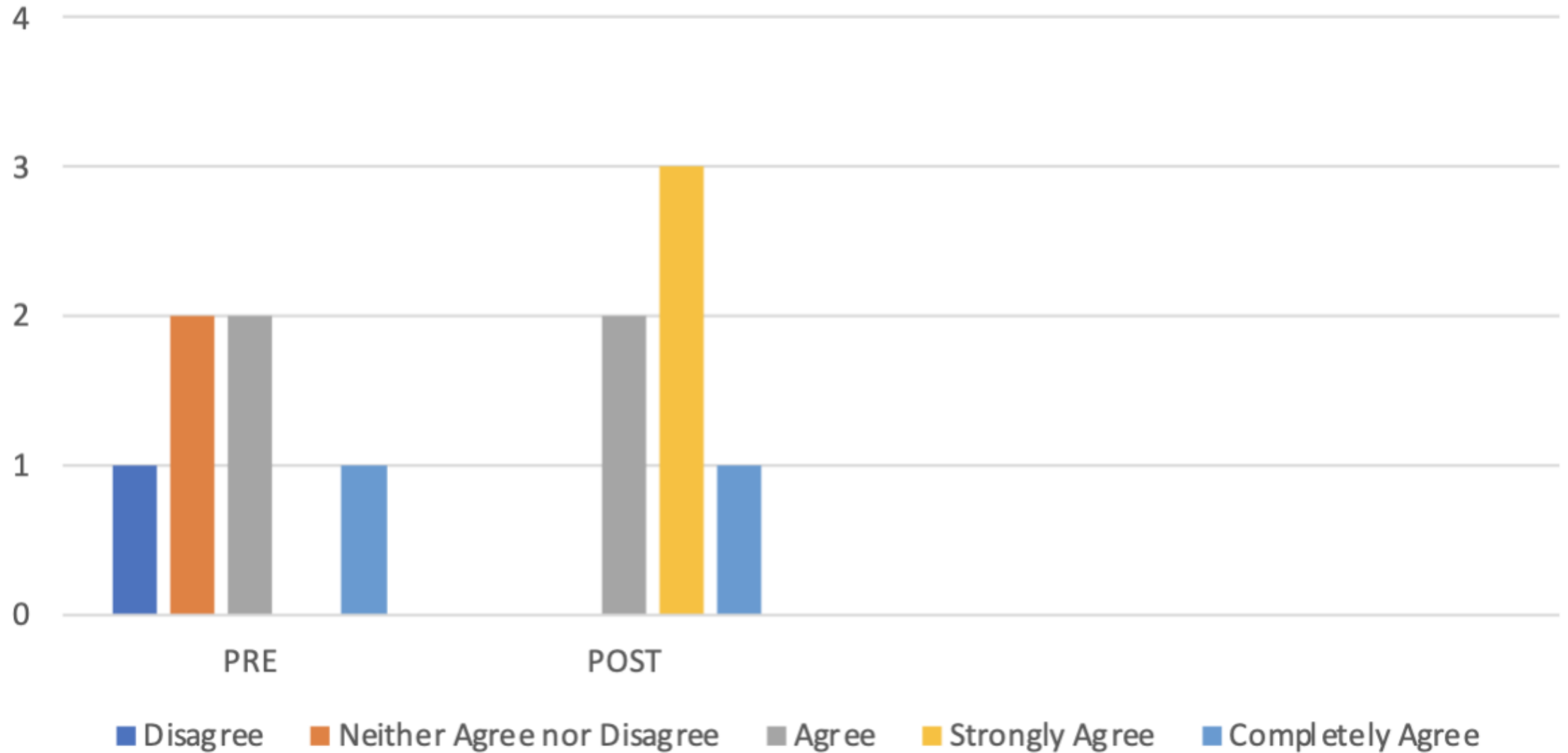
fun grounded **loving** organised supportive



## Being in nature makes me happy



## I feel a part of nature



‘What was  
helpful/useful/enjoyable  
about the Writing Tree  
Group?’

Theme 1

### **Positive Experience**

- “Fantastic way to build mindfulness”
- “Time to reflect, relax and appreciate nature”
- “Amazing experience”
- “Felt good”
- “I enjoyed the barefoot and walking and meditation too”
- “Excited to have a creative piece of work to give to my daughter”

‘What was  
helpful/useful/enjoyable  
about the Writing Tree  
Group?’

Theme 2

### **Thought Provoking**

- “Provided different points of view”
- “Really made you think what exactly you were experiencing ”
- “Great Inspiration”
- “Provoked interesting thoughts”
- “Sparked imagination”
- “Taught us skills that I’ve carried into my daily life and understood my own priorities”
- “Allowed the time to be creative”
- “Feels like I’ve accomplished something”

‘What was  
helpful/useful/enjoyable  
about the Writing Tree  
Group?’

### Theme 3

#### **Strengthening Relationships (with self, baby, partner and peers)**

- “Loved having time alone”
- “Exploring with my partner and my baby”
- “Mindfulness into our time together as a family as well as apart”
- “Was lovely to talk to and connect with parents”
- “Gave us a break of the normal day to day of being a parent”



‘What was  
unhelpful/not  
useful/ not  
enjoyable about  
the Writing Tree  
Group?’

- “I struggled with attending the virtual writing groups as they were at a time in the evening which didn’t work with our routine. However I knew that if I needed help or support with the writing that I could email”
- “Weather (out of our control)”
- Another session was needed, “with one more walk and a chance to focus on getting started with writing”