Natural Exercise for Community Health

Join in, feel good
A Green Gym for everyone...

At TCV we want healthier and happier communities for everyone and we have seen how our Green Gyms are bringing this aim to life.

Everyday we work together with people, communities and partners to connect people with their outdoor places.

Our Green Gyms have a proven impact on participants’ health & wellbeing and they’re an incredibly effective way to create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities – a priority outlined in “Fair Society, Healthy Lives” (the Marmot Review) a highly influential strategic review of health inequalities. Please help us to reach our goal.

Darren York
Managing Director
The Conservation Volunteers
Where health and fitness meets conservation

Imagine an outdoor exercise class where you’re not just working on your own health and fitness. You’re also helping to create brand-new green spaces in your town or transforming the UK’s community parks and woodlands.

That, in a nutshell, is a Green Gym! After a proper warm-up, participants are guided through activities like tree planting, food growing, and creating nature trails. They’re improving their own health and wellbeing whilst creating beautiful green spaces for the whole community to enjoy.

Green Gyms are completely free to join and, thanks to our army of brilliant and dedicated volunteers, they’re now popping up all over the country - helping communities reconnect with the great outdoors, every day.

And we’re delighted to say the momentum is building. The Department of Health has recognised that Green Gyms have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of those who take part and in early 2015, we were awarded a grant from the Government to work with its charity partner, Nesta and the Cabinet Office. Over the next five years, this will allow us to significantly grow the number of Green Gyms we can offer.

With your financial help we can make huge strides towards our ultimate goal: a Green Gym within ten minutes of every UK home.
Helping the individual

Green Gym participants represent the whole spectrum of the local community – old, young, working, retired and unemployed.

Some come because they want to get fitter. Some join in because their local health practitioners have referred them or because they’d like to improve their job prospects. And it’s clear that attendance soon becomes an important part of a participant’s social life and support network.

But it’s not just about having fun while helping the environment. We’re building up a compelling portfolio of evidence that demonstrates just how effective Green Gyms can be in improving the physical and mental health of participants.

A survey of 5,000 participants indicated an average of 120 minutes activity per week towards the government’s recommended 150.

Our ‘Health for Life in the community’ programme found that 43% of participants increased their consumption of fruit and vegetables from 1.8 to four or more portions a day.

An independent evaluation of Green Gyms by Oxford Brookes University shows that health improvements are greatest amongst those with the poorest health. This group was nine times more likely to substantially improve their health.

The same study found that participants with the lowest mental health scores were three times more likely to be the ones improving the most.

Over three-quarters of respondents agreed they had become more confident since joining the programme.
Before the Green Gym I was going through a bad patch, coming out of depression, so I was referred to a Green Gym by social workers. Working in environmental conservation has made me feel much better mentally. My life is back to normal now. I now do gardening jobs and continue to work at the Green Gym.

Walter, volunteer at Camden Green Gym

A Green Gym session can burn a third more calories than a typical aerobics class
Helping the environment

So often we take our woods, parks, allotments and gardens for granted. But a well-used green space is more than just a place to walk the dog or eat your lunch... It’s also a natural playground – and a vital classroom – for our youngsters. It’s a healthy outdoor leisure facility that’s open 24/7 for walkers, runners and cyclists. It’s a quiet sanctuary for peaceful reflection.

That’s why creating and restoring green places isn’t just about caring for nature. It’s really about caring for people. The Conservation Volunteers’ army of willing workers dedicate their time to reclaiming these vital amenities for their local communities, come wind, rain or shine. And naturally, Green Gyms are a vital part of this work.

Here are just a few typical examples of how Green Gyms are restoring the UK’s most-needed green spaces:
All of our pupils have a wide range of additional support needs and the opportunity to take part in the Green Gym gave our children a fantastic, inclusive learning experience.

Anne Kennedy,
Mary Russell School, Paisley

70% of new Green Gym recruits are still active after six months
Helping the community

Clearly, Green Gyms help the local community by restoring its vital green spaces. But they help the community in other ways too. They create a natural, mutually supportive environment where the members of the community that suffer from ill health - or the effect of society's judgments upon them - will always find a welcome.

That's why many of our Green Gym team are recovering from mental or physical illness, from surgery or even loneliness. And it's becoming increasingly clear from the support we're getting from the Department of Health that reconnecting with nature in a Green Gym is a remarkably effective way to enhance a patient's recovery - through gentle, sociable outdoor activity.

Other volunteers are suffering from the emotional and financial effects of long-term unemployment. Case study after case study has demonstrated that Green Gyms are a powerful tool to restore volunteers' self-confidence and prevent depression. And provide a route back into gainful employment.

They're also a great way to give young offenders a second chance. They provide a golden opportunity to learn brand-new skills and to build new and lasting friendships that can help them re-engage with the wider community.

But of course these benefits to the community aren't just social. They're economic too, by helping to reduce the costs of treatment and care that would otherwise fall on the public purse to support.
After a period of massive upheaval in my life I was suffering with depression, anxiety and panic attacks. Under the guidance of the Green Gym Project Officer, my abilities and confidence grew and I was able to successfully apply for a job with The Conservation Volunteers - a massive step for me.

Vicky, TCV Schools & Community Education Project Officer

95% of Green Gym participants learn brand-new skills like horticulture, construction and team-leadership

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Vicky, TCV Schools & Community Education Project Officer
Please help us make a difference

We’re making great progress, without question. Green Gym’s contribution to the nation’s health and wellbeing is now officially recognised with a growing number of government policy papers underlining just how vital our work can be.

In the Department of Health’s “Healthy Weight Healthy Lives: a cross-government strategy for England”, Green Gyms were endorsed as “a strategy to provide opportunities to increase the levels of activity in open spaces”.

The “Choosing Health” white paper stated that “a growing number of Green Gyms provide opportunities for exercise and developing social networks...demonstrating how collective action can improve the environment for health”.

In 2014, the momentum behind Green Gyms stepped up a gear with the Cabinet Office and innovation group, Nesta, awarding us a grant. This will help us build a formal Green Gym network structure with a view to raising the number of Green Gyms from 130 to 600 over the next five years.

But, that’s just the start. With your support our immediate plans include...

- Introducing a Green Gym licence that allows local community groups to use the Green Gym trademark, receive an annual quality check and access training, support and impact reporting services from TCV.
- Expanding Green Gyms into local health authorities and National Government Organisations.
- Developing Green Gyms to address specific conditions such as dementia and diabetes in partnership with charities like Mind and Diabetes UK.
Please help us make a difference

“I’m delighted to announce our investment in Green Gyms through the Centre for Social Action. Thanks to the Cabinet Office and Nesta, this funding will create over 600 sustainable Green Gyms nationally supported by a network of dedicated staff, helping to create fitter, healthier communities.”

Rob Wilson,
Minister for Civil Society
It’s clear that there is a huge demand for Green Gyms. And it’s been demonstrated beyond doubt that they’re capable of delivering resilient health outcomes to some of the most deprived communities in the UK.

As you have seen, substantial investments are starting to arrive. But with your support, we can build a community network providing the necessary resources of manpower and training, land management and community development expertise and their supporting financial infrastructure.

Ultimately, we’re confident we can move closer and closer to our ultimate goal: a Green Gym within ten minutes’ walk of every UK home.

To find out all the different ways that your organisation can support our Green Gym initiative, please contact us.

Call 01302 388 888 or email greengym@tcv.org.uk