

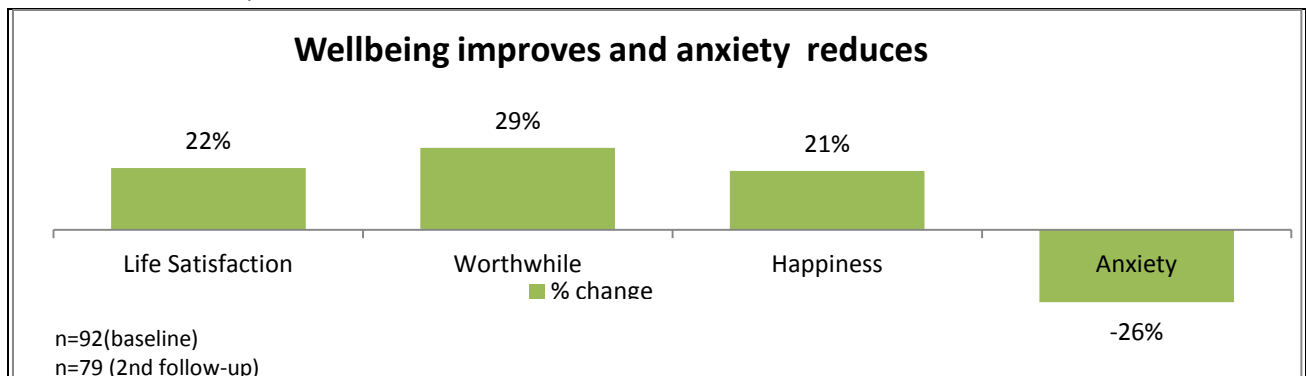
## FITTER AND BETTER OUTSIDE: GREEN GYM EVALUATION SUMMARY

Green Gyms – natural exercise for community health – supports positive changes in the health of participants and the green spaces they create and maintain. Green Gyms work to transform people’s health and wellbeing through weekly participation in outdoor activities, for example conservation, park management or food growing. By mobilising communities to come together, volunteers become more physically active whilst improving their local area at the same time. The Green Gym programme makes a solid contribution to creating resilient, healthier, individuals and communities that are better able to support themselves.

Our evaluation followed over 90 Green Gym volunteers for 3 months – From Dec 2015 – March 2016.<sup>i</sup>

### **Green Gym improves mental wellbeing**

Mental wellbeing scores improved over a three-month period with a quarter of the volunteers experiencing a decrease in anxiety<sup>ii</sup>



Nine out of ten volunteers attributed at least some of their mental well-being to participating in Green Gym. For some, participating in Green Gym improves mental wellbeing by offering much needed respite: **“I’ve got a son with special needs and the wife’s got mental health problems, so between us we survive on benefits... just coming here gives me a break.”**

For those struggling with poor mental health, often combined with challenging personal and family conditions, Green Gym offers a safe space where they are given respect and treated with empathy: **“There is no judgement [in Green Gym], no preconceived ideas about what you are or where you’ve been, what you did, what you haven’t done.”**

Green Gym focuses on shared outdoor activities; by bringing people together volunteers meet others, make friends and increase opportunities for social engagement. For a number of volunteers, weekly participation at Green Gym is the only time they speak to and spend time with others. Volunteering has a positive impact on attitudes and behaviours towards the environment, lifestyles and willingness to engage in their local community.<sup>iii</sup>

**Green Gym reduces social isolation: Over 80% of volunteers feel closer to people in their local area, worth over £700,000 in social value.<sup>iv</sup>**

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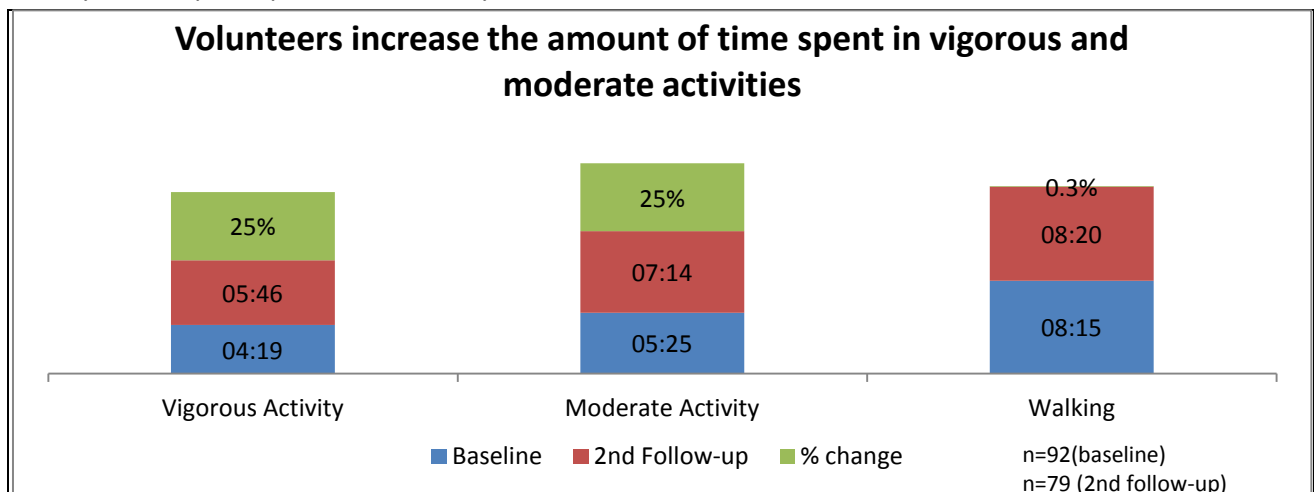
**Green Gym has established a Social Return On Investment (SROI) measure of over £4.02 of social value per £1 invested.<sup>iv</sup>**

**The personal benefit for individual, regular volunteers is worth over £4,600 in social value.<sup>iv</sup>**



### Green Gym improves physical wellbeing

On average, volunteers spent 50% more time engaged in vigorous and moderate activities at the end of the three month study period<sup>v</sup>. Volunteers were walking more too. Nine out of ten attribute their physical activity level to participation in Green Gym.



A number of volunteers equate being fitter with a change in dietary habits - eating more fresh vegetables and less junk food and take-aways. Volunteers attribute the change to their own experience of food growing as a result of Green Gym: **"I know how to grow fruit and veg now in the garden, I know how to cook seasonal veg, so I make a lot of soup now."**

Encouraging healthy living is a part of the Green Gym ethos and helps to support lifestyle change, particularly for conditions such as diabetes: **"I think finding out I was diabetic, I had to change my diet anyway, so I cut out all sweets and cakes,... [and at Green Gym].. they do try and promote healthy eating and healthy lifestyle."**

Green Gym supports weight loss. Green Gym evaluation in N. Ireland found over 80% of volunteers lost weight after becoming more active as a result of Green Gym.<sup>vi</sup>

**Increasing the physical health of volunteers by as little as 33% is worth £2.6 million.<sup>iv</sup>**

## FITTER AND BETTER OUTSIDE: GREEN GYM EVALUATION SUMMARY

### Green Gym improves employability

Participation in Green Gym is an opportunity to get back into work. Many hope to update skills, gain experience or a reference through volunteering: **“I used to do gardening years ago... so it's the sort of thing that I want to do as a job, but I've been many years' unemployed for a long time, so I thought it may be a good way to refresh my skills.”**

Getting back to work can be difficult. Green Gym volunteering can help restore confidence, teach new skills and establish a routine – helping people get their foot back on the job ladder: **“I think some of it is taken out of my hands, the jobs that need doing, you know, it's not all my responsibility to decide what they are – there's a structure here that makes me do stuff.”**

**Volunteers in the most deprived areas on the Index of Multiple Deprivation show the most pro-environmental behaviour change, as a result of their volunteering experience.**<sup>iii</sup>



### Summary

The financial constraints on the health and social care system have placed significant strain on the NHS and social care provision. The sharp increase in conditions associated with sedentary lifestyles is costing an estimated £8.2 billion a year<sup>vii</sup>. One in four British adults experience a mental health problem annually - interlinked psychological and physical health problems are costing the NHS alone more than £11 billion a year<sup>viii</sup>. The Department of Health recognises that Green Gyms have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of those who take part. Green Gyms directly support the reduction of health inequalities by targeting recognised at risk groups. Green Gyms reduce the demand for health and care services by getting those susceptible to preventable illnesses (more) active and those impacted by isolation and loneliness into a socially inclusive environment.

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<sup>i</sup> J.Beishon, N.Munoz (2016) I feel fitter and better being outside: Green Gym evaluation report. TCV

<sup>ii</sup> ONS questions used to measure wellbeing: <http://bit.ly/1YIGsMW>

<sup>iii</sup> TCV (2014) Volunteering impacts <http://www.tcv.org.uk/volunteering/volunteering-impacts>

<sup>iv</sup> NEF / TCV (2015) TCV's impact: Organisational Social Return On Investment. Summary findings. (for more information on this report contact [n.munoz@tcv.org.uk](mailto:n.munoz@tcv.org.uk))

<sup>v</sup> IPAQ questions used to measure physical wellbeing: <http://growyourwellness.com/tools/physical-inactivity-assessment/international-physical-activity-questionnaire-ipaq>

<sup>vi</sup> Dr K Collins (2015) Independent evaluation of the Green Gym programme delivered in Northern Ireland.

<sup>vii</sup> [https://www.noo.org.uk/NOO\\_about\\_obesity/lifestyle](https://www.noo.org.uk/NOO_about_obesity/lifestyle)

<sup>viii</sup> Bringing together Physical and Mental Health. <http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/>