

“I feel fitter and better being outside”

Green Gym Evaluation Report

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Royal Society for Public Health - Health and Wellbeing Award winners

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The Community Volunteering Charity

Table of Contents	Page
Background	
1. Summary	3
2. Green Gym	4
3. Current health context	5
Methodology	
4. Research objectives	7
5. Method	7
6. Profile of participating Green Gyms	11
7. Profile of participating volunteers	12
Key Findings	
8. Referral Partners	14
9. Motivation to join Green Gym	17
10. Wellbeing	18
11. Physical activity	20
12. Employability skills	22
13. New volunteers	23
Discussion	
14. Summary	27
Appendices	
A. Survey questionnaire	30
B. Topic guide for interviews with volunteers	46
C. Topic guide for interviews with referral orgs	47
D. NESTA Levels of Evidence	48

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Forward

The financial constraints on the health and social care system have placed significant strain on the NHS and social care provision. However, it has also offered an opportunity to rethink how we get to grips with some of the demographic, health and lifestyle challenges we are facing, particularly for the most vulnerable in our society.

Engaging and interacting within our communities has been shown to boost our happiness, as we form a sense of belonging, build our confidence and learn new skills. As a result it makes us more resilient. Green Gym has taken these principles and coupled them with exercise and nature. The result is a hugely popular model combating many of the underlying causes of poor physical and psychological health.

The challenge for the TCV research team has been to gather diverse Green Gym experiences and turn them into concrete evidence. TCV asked NEF Consulting to support them in identifying and measuring Green Gym impact. It has been a task as exciting in its potential as it has been tough to deliver.

This report adds to the growing evidence base highlighting that Green Gym has a positive impact on wellbeing, and the ability to bring communities together, breaking down the social isolation that afflicts so many in our society.

Green Gym volunteers gain enormous practical benefits and some have had life-changing experiences beginning new careers, tackling long-standing health issues or building precious friendship networks. The wellbeing benefits are compelling and wider findings provide a base for stronger Green Gym evaluation systems going forward.

We hope you find this report informative and encourage anyone looking to improve or build a case for Green Gym to draw upon its conclusions.

Alison Freeman, Senior Consultant, New Economics Foundation (NEF) April 2016

Section 1) Summary

Green Gym is effective in both improving and maintaining physical and mental health. Key mechanisms include increasing physical activity levels and reducing social isolation by creating opportunities for people to work together in worthwhile outdoor activities. Reducing social isolation, improving the local environment and developing key employability skills are highly valued by volunteers. Green Gyms increase resilience, creating healthier individuals and communities that are better able to support themselves. Development of an internal insight function and creation of robust outcome metrics will strengthen Green Gym's ability to continue to offer inclusive and tailored projects to meet a wide range of needs.



Section 2) Green Gym

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 physically active whilst improving their local area at the same time.

What is a Green Gym?

The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) and Dr William Bird created the Green Gym concept, with the original model piloted in 1997 in partnership with Sonning Common Health Centre and in 1999 with East Sussex Brighton and Hove Health Authority.

Green Gyms are a weekly activity - running for 3-4 hours at a local community facility such as a park, usually in the day time on a weekday. Each Green Gym has up-to 50-60 volunteers, with turnout on any one week typically ranging from six to 20.

Sessions include a warm-up, cool-down, and a wide range of gardening and land management activities. Intensity increases over time according to ability. Volunteers may begin with a light task such as potting seedlings and later move onto wheel barrowing gravel or soil. In increasing their activity, volunteers improve their fitness over time. They also develop a social network that provides peer support, and have higher levels of contact with the outdoors. This powerful combination helps volunteers to develop resilience against mental and physical health problems, and through learning how to manage green space - new skills, knowledge and confidence. The key objectives of Green Gyms are to improve volunteers:

- **Health and Wellbeing** – by increasing or maintaining fitness, reducing isolation and supporting better mental wellbeing
- **Employability** – by increasing knowledge, skills and confidence

Green Gyms run in a highly inclusive way and successfully engage with a very wide range of volunteers, including those where other organisations may struggle, including significant proportions of volunteers from very deprived backgrounds, and those with physical and mental health problems. As sessions run during the week, participants are typically not in full time work. People may simply turn up or be referred by local health, social care and voluntary sector partners. TCV initially manage and lead these sessions (for the first 18 months - two years). Over this period of time, staff train and mentor participants to develop the skills and confidence to run the Green Gym themselves. From here, as they develop their skills base, groups may migrate to become self-sustaining and community-led, as an independently constituted community group.

Section 3) Current Health Context

There has been a sharp increase in conditions associated with sedentary lifestyles. Prevalence of type 2 diabetes in the UK has doubled in the last 20 years and is expected to reach 5m by 2020¹. Sedentary behaviour is linked to overweight and obesity, some types of cancer and metabolic dysfunction. The total cost of inactivity in England has been estimated at £8.2 billion a year². Poor physical health can lead to increased risk of developing mental health problems. Moreover, poor mental health can negatively impact on physical health. One in four British adults experience a mental health problem annually³ and the Kings Fund suggests interlinked psychological and physical health problems are costing the NHS alone more than £11 billion a year⁴.

According to the Five Year Forward view, sustainability of the NHS and the economic prosperity of Britain all depend on a radical upgrade in prevention and public health⁵. However, since 2010, a decline in Government funding - leading to cuts in local authority spending of up to 40%⁶ - has reduced the ability of public services to work with and support communities to improve health and wellbeing. The current climate of austerity has created an additional drive to utilise and develop community projects which contribute to improving the social fabric of a community and create positive health and wellbeing outcomes for individuals.

While local authority budgets are declining, Green Gyms can provide a low cost 'gateway' activity to health and wellbeing improvement. Green Gyms reduce the demand for health and care services by getting those susceptible to preventable illnesses (more) active and, those affected by isolation and loneliness, into a socially inclusive environment. Green Gyms directly support the reduction of health inequalities by targeting recognised at risk groups. Specialist Green Gyms support people with learning disabilities, people with mental health problems, and the wider suicide prevention plan. A single Green Gym can impact a number of Public Health Outcomes Framework (PHOF) indicators (see list below) and offers an exit strategy for the NHS Health Check, significantly enhancing return on investment (ROI):

- 1.16 utilisation of outdoor space for exercise/health
- 1.18 social isolation
- 2.12 Excess weight in adults
- 2.13i & 2.13ii active and inactive adults
- 2.14 smoking prevalence
- 2.17 recorded diabetes
- 2.23 set – self reported wellbeing
- 4.04 set – CVD mortality rate

¹ Harvey et al 2002, *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2002;**56**:18-23 doi:10.1136/jech.56.1.18

² http://www.noo.org.uk/NOO_about_obesity/lifestyle

³ Adult Psychiatric Morbidity in England – 2007 - <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/pubs/psychiatricmorbidity07>

⁴ Bringing together Physical and Mental Health. <http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/>

⁵ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/5yfv-web.pdf>

⁶ The Impact of Funding Reductions on Local Authorities. NAO 2014

Green Gyms provide a social return on investment (SROI) of £4 for every £1 spent⁷. Recent examination by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) found Green Gyms delivered significant financial benefits for volunteers themselves, the health service and wider community, in particular:

- Increasing the physical health of volunteers by an average of 33% - worth £2.6 million
- Reducing social isolation – worth in excess of £700,000
- Increasing wellbeing through ‘giving back’ to the local community and having fun – worth £400,000

Green Gyms offer statutory agencies the opportunity to support the health and wellbeing of individuals, improve the local environment and develop social value by creating sustainable community organisations.

Plans to increase the number of Green Gyms

TCV plans to grow from around 100 to 600+ sustainable Green Gyms over the next five years. This will enable up to 15,500 people to engage in social action to improve their health and the places where they live. TCV’s ultimate vision is to create Green Gyms available to all, with everyone (in an urban area) having a Green Gym within a 10-minute walk of where they live. The scaling up of Green Gyms across the country is being supported by Nesta and the Cabinet Office, through the Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund. The Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund⁸ supports the growth of innovations that mobilise people’s energy and talents to help each other, working alongside public services.



⁷ 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)

⁸ <http://www.nesta.org.uk/project/centre-social-action-innovation-fund>

Section 4) Research Objectives

The Evaluation

The aim of the evaluation is:

To build on the existing body of evidence - prove the impact of Green Gyms on health and wellbeing and increased employability

Demonstrating the health and wellbeing impact of Green Gym

TVC's mission is to create healthier, happier communities. Green Gym does this by bringing people together to revitalise local green spaces. Our volunteers become more active, improving their physical health, make more frequent and meaningful contact with others – reducing isolation and improving mental wellbeing and contributing to community cohesion. There is interest, amongst both public health bodies and health charities in using Green Gyms more widely as a health promotion intervention. Put simply, commissioners, service users and investors all need evidence to know whether the products or services they buy or invest in make a positive difference.

Demonstrating and understanding our impact is essential to underpin and expand the Green Gym programme.



Section 5) Method

Design

A mixed method approach was used. A short questionnaire survey collected once a month – for three months (December 2015, Jan & Feb 2016) and a series of qualitative interviews with both volunteers and referral partners.

Questionnaires and Topic Guides

Both the survey and interviews gather information on the main Green Gym impact outcomes - better health and wellbeing and increased employability.

Figure 1 – Green Gym Logic Model

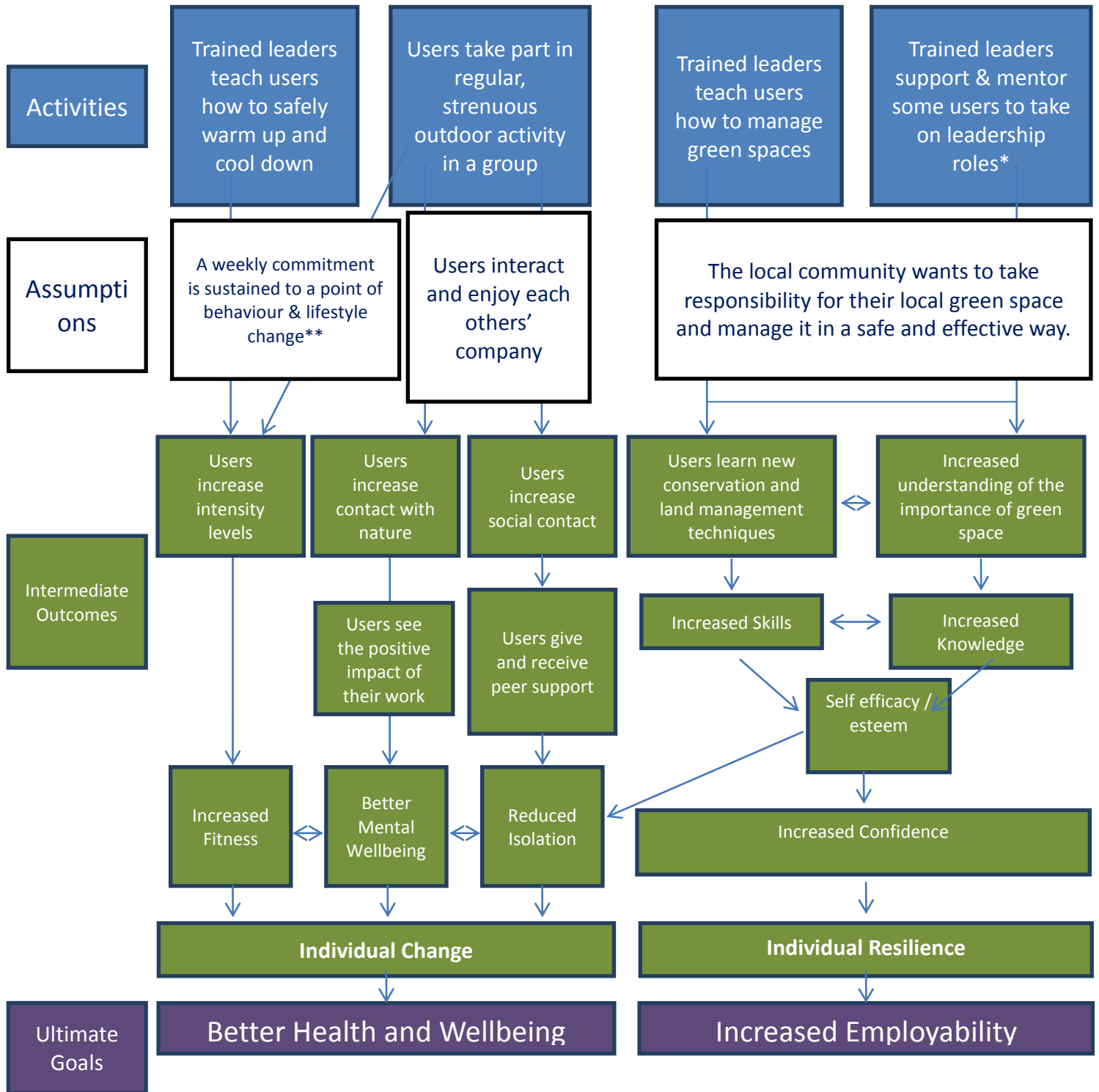


Figure 2 – Outcomes and Tools

The outcomes we measured		The tools we used to measure these outcomes
Better Health and Wellbeing	Motivation to join Green Gym	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bespoke questions • Interviews with volunteers
	Increased fitness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The International Physical Activity Questionnaire • Interviews with volunteers and referral partners
	Better mental wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortened Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale-WEMWBS • Office for National Statistics Wellbeing Questions • Interviews with volunteers • Interviews with referral partners
	Reduced Isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office for National Statistics Wellbeing Question • Interviews with volunteers
Increased Employability	Increased skills and knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with volunteers • Interviews with referral partners
	Increased confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with volunteers

Demographic information was collected in the first month of the survey (baseline), and a small number of attribution questions were asked each month to assess the extent to which volunteers attributed their behaviour and feelings to Green Gym participation and being outdoors.

A fifth of volunteers either had no internet access to complete the survey on-line, or did not feel confident to do so. A proportion required significant support to take part in the research; this included, but was not exclusive to volunteers with mild to moderate learning difficulties. Some volunteers struggled to read and comprehend the written word fluently. This often appeared linked with a lack of confidence to attempt the task. A number of volunteers are limited in their ability to fully self-reflect in response to the qualitative interview process. This has implications for the quality of the data collected from some volunteers.

Figure 3 – Qualitative Interviews

Type of participant	Referral Partner	New Volunteer	Existing Volunteer
Number of volunteers	5	6	12
Number of interviews	Single interview	Paired interview ⁹	Single interview
Mode of interview	Telephone	Personal and telephone	Personal and telephone

Eighteen semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with volunteers from five Green Gyms, representing both urban and rural areas. Six of the 18 volunteers were new members (attending Green Gym for less than 4 weeks), with the remaining 12 active in Green Gyms for between six months – three years.

Single interviews were conducted with 12 volunteers in December 2015. Paired interviews (before and after) were conducted with new volunteers at the beginning of the study in December 2015 and at the end in February/March 2016.

Thirteen volunteers were interviewed in confidential spaces at Green Gym project sites and five were interviewed by telephone.

A further five interviews were conducted (over the telephone) with referral partners - organisations that formally or informally send their clients to Green Gyms (see appendices B and C for the interview guides we used).

Analysis

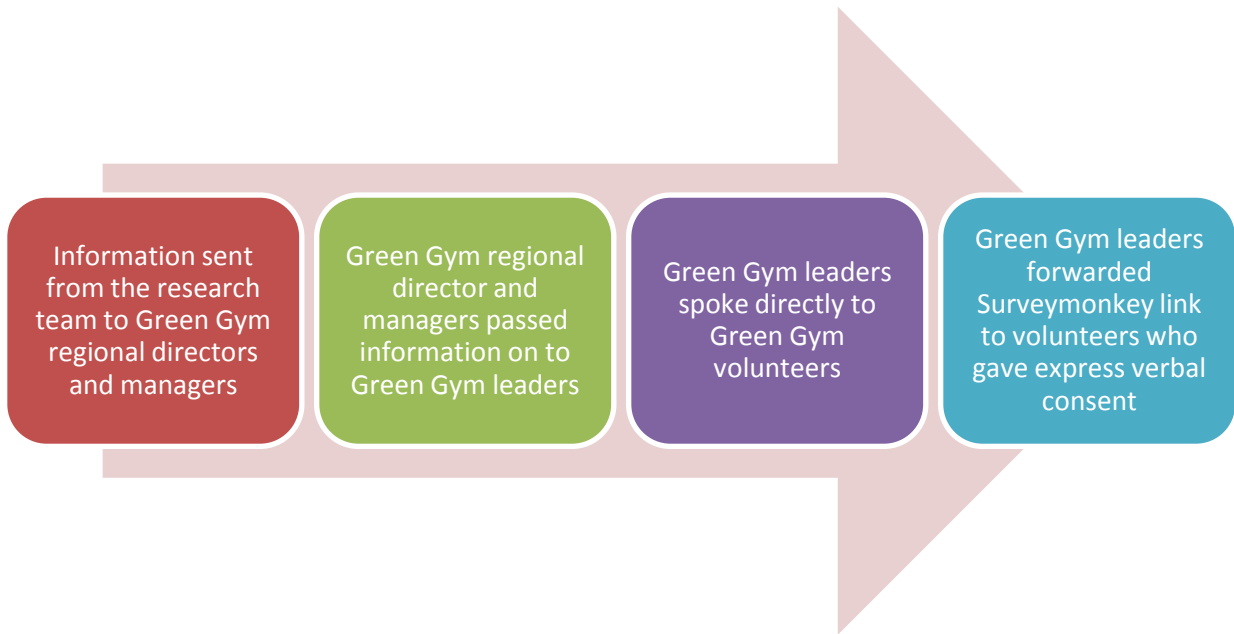
Excel was used to collate and analyse the questionnaire data from SurveyMonkey. Qualitative data was analysed using QDA Miner using a thematic and framework approach to identify themes and patterns in the data.

Quantitative Sampling and Data Collection

A pragmatic approach was taken to sampling both Green Gyms and volunteers for (see Figure 4 on next page):

⁹ 5 of the 7 were interviewed twice – once in December 2015 and again in March 2016

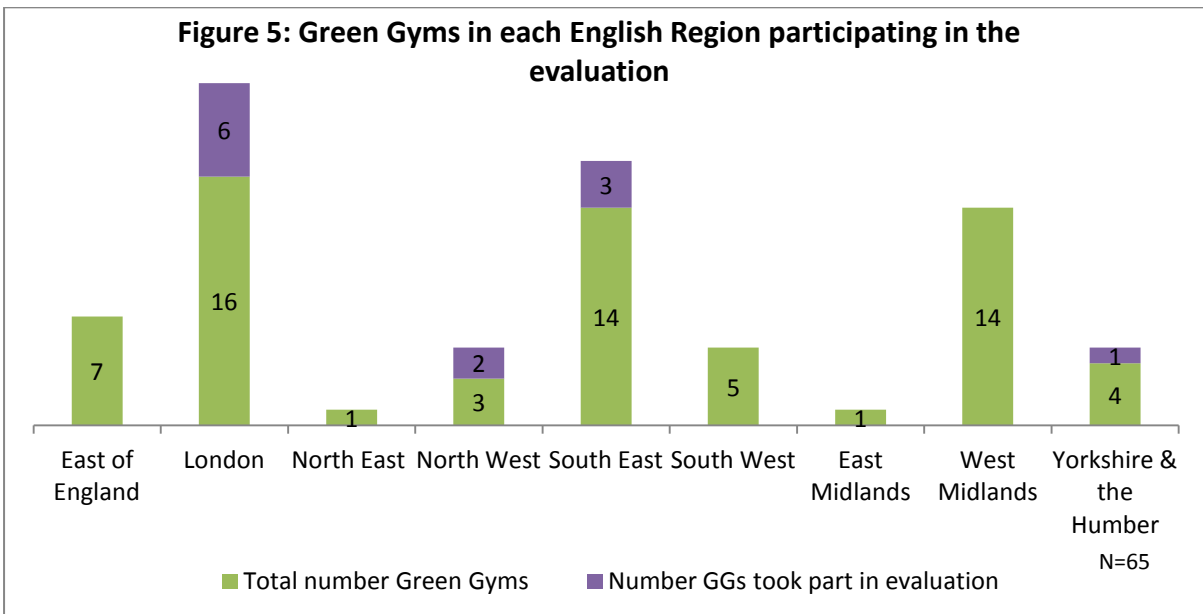
Figure 4 – Process used to recruit volunteers to the study



Section 6) Profile of Participating Green Gyms

Response from Green Gyms

Twelve Green Gyms took part in the study, representing 18% of all Green Gyms in England¹⁰. Seven direct delivery and five community led. Green Gyms based in four of the nine English regions participated in the study. Green Gyms in London and the South-East are disproportionately featured.



¹⁰ Records held on TVC’s management information system (MIS) in December 2015 identified 65 Green Gyms (England only). Just under half (31) are direct delivery – run and organised by TCV staff with the rest (34) run by local communities.



Section 7) Profile of Participating Volunteers

Response from volunteers

Ninety two volunteers from 12 Green Gyms across England returned baseline survey questionnaires. This represents 15% of all Green Gym volunteers over the two week survey period¹¹. Of the 92 who completed the baseline in December 2015, 80 completed a further follow-up in January 2016 and 79 completed a second follow-up in February 2016. With 13 volunteers dropping out of Green Gym over the three month period, the overall response rate (comparing the number completing the baseline with the number completing follow-up surveys) was 86%.

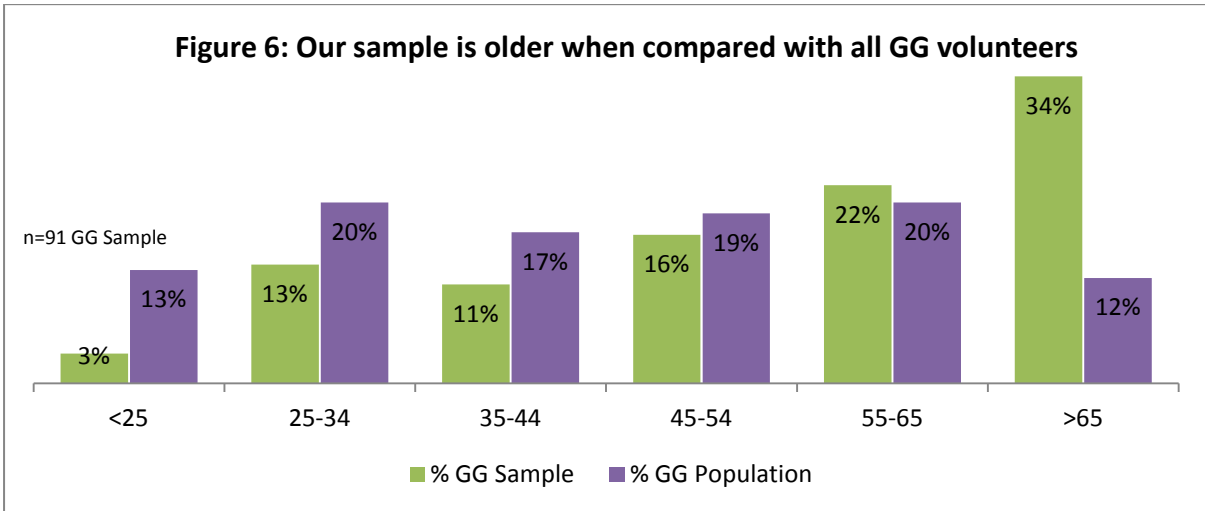
Profile of Participating Volunteers – Gender, Age and Ethnicity

Women, non-white ethnic minorities and those aged under 54 are under-represented in the survey sample¹² – with the largest disparity at the youngest age groups.

¹¹ For the two week survey period in December 2015, 334 active volunteers are registered on TCV's management information system across 31 direct delivery Green Gyms, an average of 11 volunteers per Green Gym.

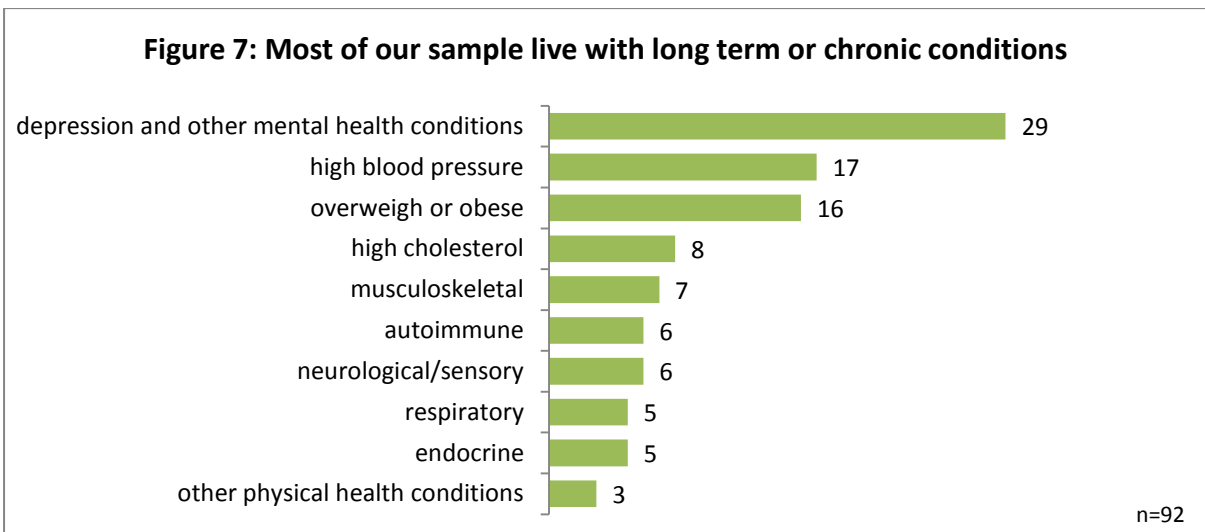
Each community Green Gym is responsible for holding its own records and no central database exists from which the number of volunteers in all community Green Gyms can be ascertained. However, anecdotal information gathered from TCV Green Gym leaders (experienced in developing community Green Gym groups) suggests community run Green Gym groups are approximately 70% of the size of direct delivery Green Gyms. Using this fraction gives a population of 275 active volunteers (for the two week survey period in including December 2015) for the 34 community Green Gyms in England.

¹² As compared with the population of all Green Gym volunteers in England in December 2015



Health Profile of Participating Volunteers

Many volunteers live with multiple physical and/or mental health conditions. Nearly a third (32%) of volunteers participating in the survey and nearly half of those interviewed (eight out of 18) are living with mental health conditions.



Volunteer Engagement with Green Gym

Nearly half of volunteers joined Green Gym more than two years ago with a further quarter joining between six months and two years ago. The remainder are new volunteers joining Green Gym within the last six months. Most volunteers are regular attendees – with nearly four out of five attending Green Gym once a week or more.

Attrition

Thirteen volunteers (who had completed the baseline survey) dropped out of Green Gym over the three month period and were, therefore, no longer eligible to take part in the evaluation. Volunteer attrition is a concern because loss of volunteers may result in subsequent data that is increasingly biased. Ten of the 13 who stopped attending Green Gym provided further information. A range of reasons for no longer attending Green Gym were given – including difficult family situations such as bereavement or personal health breakdown (five volunteers) or problems with benefits and social

welfare payments (one volunteer). Positive outcomes – such as getting paid employment or taking an extended holiday out of the UK (four volunteers), were also given as reasons for no longer attending Green Gym. Despite multiple calls /emails –there was no further contact with three volunteers and their reasons for leaving Green gym are unknown.

Section 8) Referral Partners

Referral organisations

We spoke to five referral organisations about how they work with their local Green Gyms, how their clients benefit from Green Gym and what process improvements would add further value to the referral process.

How are referrals made to Green Gym?

A wide range of health, social care, employment, training organisations and voluntary sector bodies refer and signpost to Green Gyms. Types of relationships with partners include formal referrals via 'social prescribing' - linking people (usually, but not exclusively, via primary care) with non-medical sources of support within the community, to more informal channels such as featuring Green Gym on partner websites, endorsing Green Gym to clients and sharing Green Gym literature.

The process of referring service users to Green Gym is similar throughout the organisations we spoke to – initially, clients are recommended Green Gym and their details are forwarded by telephone to Green Gym Project Officers / Volunteer Coordinator, who then arrange a visit directly with the client. Alternatively, referring organisations will simply ask clients to just turn up at a Green Gym session.

In general, referring organisation are happy with this system and believe it works well, primarily because it is low maintenance for the person making the referral, as it relies on conversations over the phone or face to face (f2f) rather than the completion of forms. However, the nature of the Green Gym Project Officer's work can mean that they are not always immediately available and this can create a delay in sharing information and making contact with new volunteers.

Referral organisations are increasingly moving towards more technology based solutions operating without an intermediary or 'broker' to match and place clients. New web-based systems allow potential volunteers to register their interest on-line. All projects that 'fit' the specifications identified automatically receive an indication of interest. Although such new systems will be faster at sharing indications of interest, those without internet access will undoubtedly be disadvantaged. Indicative assessments¹³ suggest a higher proportion (than the national average) of Green Gym volunteers do not have internet access at home and/or are not comfortable using it – suggesting the potential pool of Green Gym volunteers may be affected by a shift from f2f to web-based solutions.

Current referral partners are great advocates for Green Gym, well informed about the benefits of participation: **“definitely, definitely going to keep promoting it. It's a great opportunity to have, so**

¹³ From the 'Design Jam' event held in 2015 when planning the National Evaluation, the pilot carried out before the National Evaluation and from the data collection process of the National Evaluation in which a large proportion of volunteers used paper questionnaires due to lack of internet access or lack of confidence using on-line options.

I'll definitely keep sending it out to people and telling people of the benefits". It is not clear if or how the same degree of enthusiasm and advocacy can or will be transmitted via web-based solutions and the transition to new systems may impact on the number of Green Gym volunteers recruited.

Relationships between Green Gym project leaders (primarily responsible for recruiting volunteers) and referral partners have often been built up over a number of years. Typically – referral partners are given the opportunity to join a session at their local Green Gym. Experiencing Green Gym for themselves and becoming more informed about Green Gym allows referral staff – to better inform their clients. New Green Gym leaders are expected to have good knowledge and awareness of local referral partners. It is not clear what central systems are in place to support and refresh this process.

What do referral partners like about Green Gym?

Referrers identified two features of Green Gym that set it apart from many other volunteering opportunities and made it possible for them to consider it as an option for a wide range of client groups: flexibility and intensity. The flexibility of Green Gym – encouraging regular participation but (unlike some other volunteering opportunities) not mandating it or making it a condition of joining - allows volunteers to 'fit it in' when they can - while still maintaining domestic or other commitments for example only during term time or short term volunteering – in-between jobs or attending for just an hour each week rather than staying for the whole session. **"Others [other volunteering projects] want you to come in once a week on a set day every week ... but the GG is more flexible so if they don't feel like coming for a day they don't have to ... especially if people are suffering with mental health [conditions]..."**

The flexibility and intensity of Green Gym, the social element and being outdoors are strong reasons for referring clients. The variety and mix of people, and acceptance within the projects are positive assets. One referral partner emphasised the inclusivity of the Green Gym: **"it's really good that they get to inter-mingle and mix with people and for them - particularly being homeless or having experience of homelessness - they're going to feel quite a lot of stigma. Going to a project where they are just another volunteer and people chat to them and they're another volunteer without necessarily knowing their case history - it's a really big, BIG positive thing for them."**

Maintaining attendance and low drop-out rates, as compared to some other volunteer opportunities, is a clear indication, for referral partners, of the effectiveness of Green Gym for their clients.

What feedback would referral partners like to receive?

Referring organisation do not automatically receive formal feedback about their clients from Green Gym. Referral partners receive status updates on an ad-hoc basis direct from their clients. Feedback received is very positive – their clients greatly enjoy Green Gym sessions and referral partners report clients have an increase in motivation, improvement in mood, increased confidence, and a new sense of purpose. **" ... when we check in with them that day and say, you know "how did it go?" they'll be very, very effusive of it and [talk about] how much they enjoyed it... you can just sort of see it in their expression and how they are talking about something [Green Gym] that is a big thing rather than [saying] "well I'm just feeling really depressed today and I haven't done anything."**

Although referral partners feel that they could contact Project Officers for an update, they tend not to. Referral partners are keen to know what type of horticultural or community greening activities their client has engaged in, what progress they are making towards any agreed objectives and how much their clients are enjoying the experience. Regular, formal feedback from Green Gym would be a useful tool particularly for more vulnerable volunteers as a way to 'flag' to referral partners the need for additional client support. Moreover, formal feedback is useful for funding applications from referral partners keen to increase the number of Green gyms in their area.

Barriers in referring volunteers to Green Gym

When asked, referral partners could think of few reasons that would hinder referrals, however, capacity and the need for more Green Gyms was an issue. **"...so now there is no need for me to look at that GP referral route but that was always the plan -that it would be kind of the exercise on prescription referral route but now we're at capacity ...we don't need to do that but that was always the plan."**

Having more Green Gyms available is only part of the solution. Carers or support workers from statutory agencies assist certain client groups to take part in Green Gym. Without staffing availability to give support – additional Green Gym places cannot be utilised: **"the people that we've currently got coming to the Green Gym need quite a lot of support, they've got learning difficulties and they need a bit more one-to-one support, we wouldn't be able to manage an influx of new people [to Green Gym]."**

Referral partners mentioned difficulty with transport and timeliness. Not all Green Gyms are easy to access by public transport. Those particular Green Gyms are less suitable to refer clients with low mobility and/or without their own transport. In a small number of areas, referral partners work with local Green Gyms to offer outreach transport services to enable those who need it most to access Green Gyms. In addition, managing volunteers with wide ranging needs sometimes leads to a less than prompt start to Green Gym sessions. This has a knock on effect of reducing the Green Gym session for those volunteers who must leave promptly and are unable to stay on if the session overruns.

Case study – West Leeds PEP (Patient Empowerment Project)

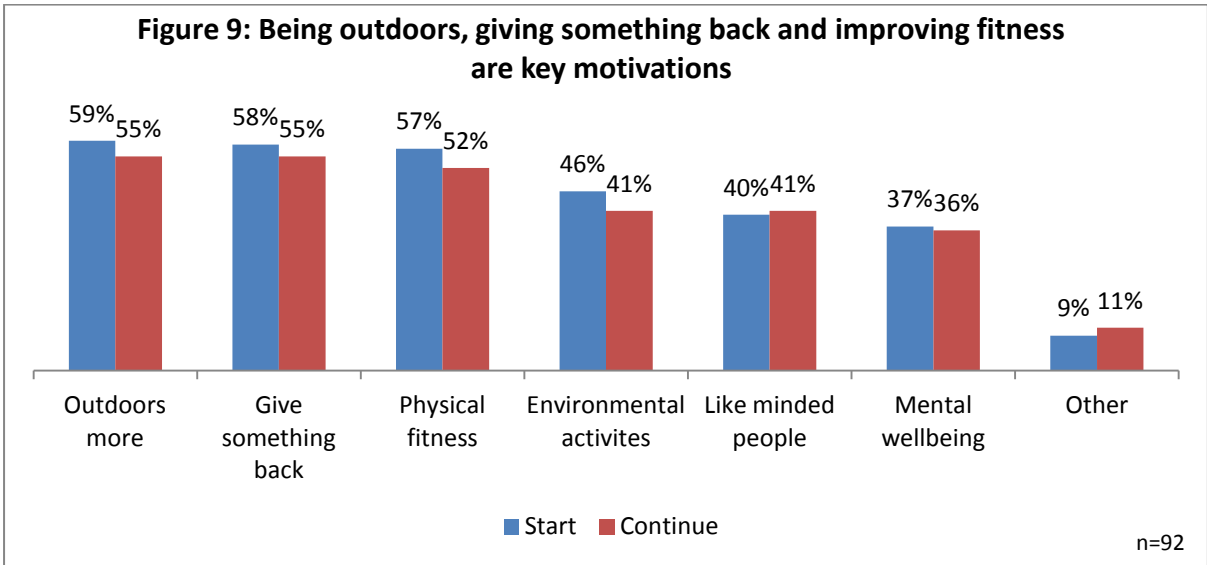
Hollybush Green Gym is a member of West Leeds Patient Empower Project (PEP). Funded by NHS West Leeds Clinical Commissioning Group, voluntary organisations to deliver a social prescribing service in conjunction with the 38 GP surgeries in West Leeds. Social prescribing extends the range of options available to patients who present to primary care with psychosocial and health problems that would benefit from increased social engagement and more physical activity.

Once referred by their GP, PEP makes contact to discuss their needs and interests and gives information on suitable projects. PEP staff support for patients at their first session, helping them get started in a new group, service or activity. Referred patients manage their health and psychosocial issues using the skills, knowledge and confidence gained from Green Gym.



Section 9) Motivation to Join Green Gym

Why do volunteers join Green Gym?



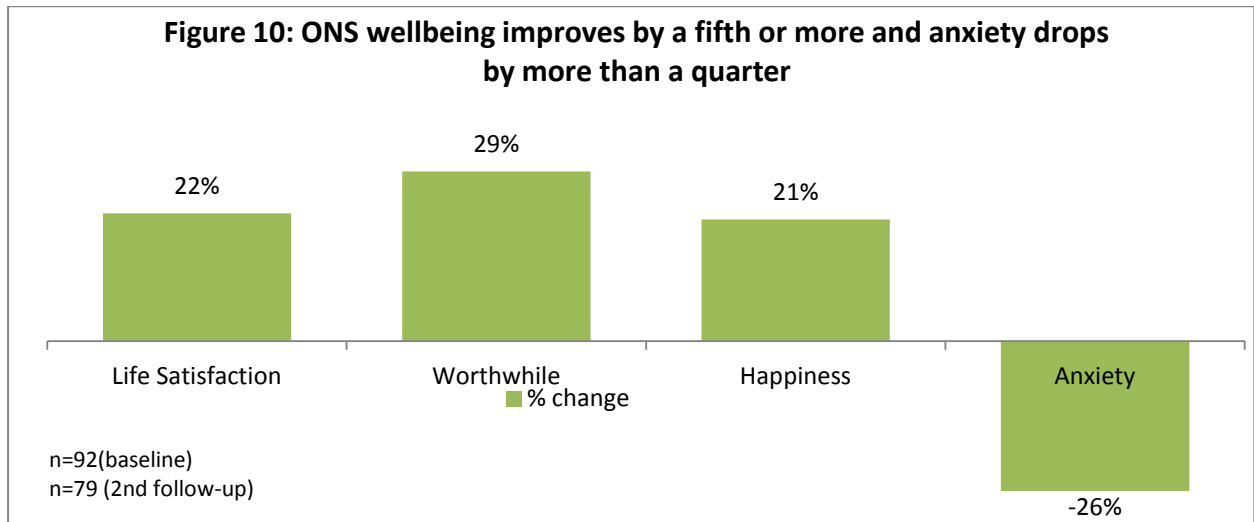
A desire to be outdoors more, giving something back to the local community and an increase in physical fitness were the most popular reasons given for both joining and continuing to attend Green Gym.

Interviewed volunteers spoke about enjoying being outdoors and getting fresh air and a wish to help others as key drivers in joining and continuing to participate in Green Gym. Interviewed volunteers (compared to the sample as a whole) were more focused on their own health needs as a reason for joining Green Gym. This is likely to reflect the more acute social and psychological needs of the interviewees as a group when compared to the survey sample as a whole.

Section 10) Wellbeing

Impact of Green Gym on Mental Wellbeing

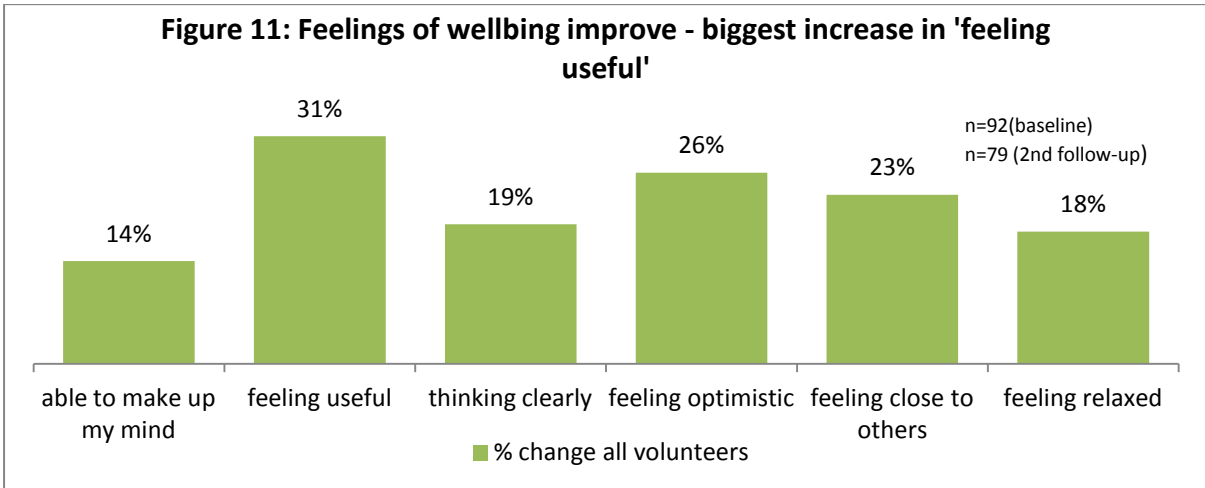
We used two scales to assess mental well being – Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) and ONS Personal Wellbeing. Wellbeing scores improved over the three month period for the sample as a whole, with a large decrease in anxiety and nine out of ten volunteers attributed at least some of their wellbeing to participating in Green Gym. New volunteers showed a larger degree of improvement, when compared with the sample as a whole (see section 14 on page 26 for more).



Qualitative evidence supports the gains represented by the survey results. All interviewed volunteers report an improvement or a stabilisation of existing mental health conditions. For some, participating in Green Gym improved mental wellbeing by offering much needed respite from a challenging home life: **“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”**

A strong ethos of respect and feeling ‘safe’ in Green Gym is perceived as a significant factor in facilitating mental wellbeing. This is particularly the case for volunteers rebuilding lives after custodial sentences and those trying to overcome drug or alcohol misuse: **“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.”**

Volunteers spoke about the stigma attached to mental health conditions and discrimination they experienced as a result, making their difficulties worse. 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, not ‘labelled’ because of their diagnosis, background or life experiences. For some it’s a haven where individual needs and aspirations are supported, offering respite from the realities of life. For at least one volunteer – Green Gym is a lifeline: **“It might sound a bit dramatic but I don't think I'd be here now if it hadn't been for [Green Gym]”**



Survey results indicate satisfaction with social life increased by over 20% over the three month evaluation period.

Mental health challenges and life changes leave some volunteers socially isolated, with little confidence, and heightened anxiety. Staying at home for an extended period of time and feeling 'stuck' indoors was a consistent theme: **"I wasn't going out at that time, I'd come out of hospital, I had been discharged, I'd gone through a big change in my life, total u-turn in my life with what happened and I was struggling and I was staring at walls basically."**

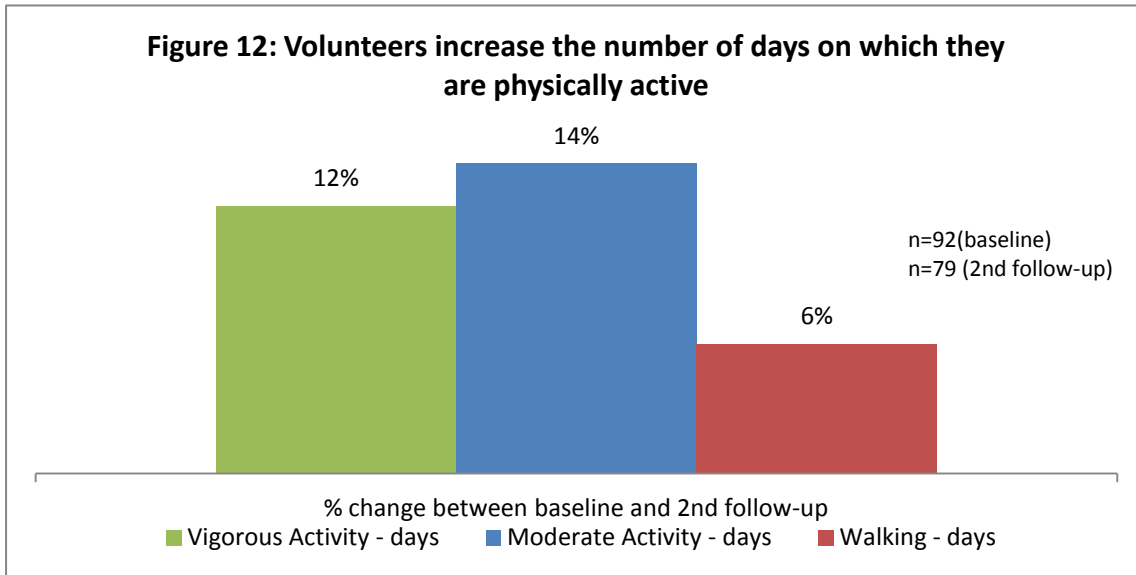
When interviewed, reducing isolation and increasing opportunities for social contact is a key attraction of Green Gym for many volunteers. **"I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have [Green Gym] here, because I'm a loner you see, I just got me cat, that's it."**

Green Gym is focused on outdoor activities that can be shared; 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.

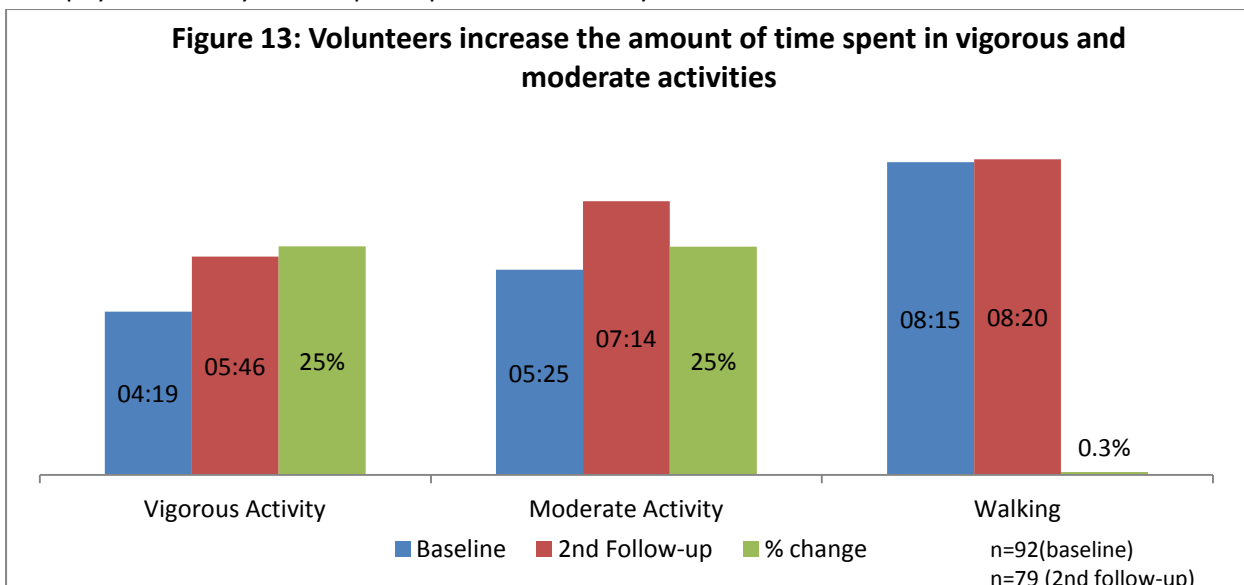
Section 11) Physical Activity

Increased Fitness

Using the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) we asked volunteers on how many days in the last week they had done any vigorous or moderate activity or had walked (to see the question in full – please see questionnaire in appendix A). Over the three month period, volunteers increased the number of days on which they are physically active. The largest increase is in the number of days volunteers engage in moderate activity, closely matched by an increase in the number of days volunteers engage in vigorous activity. Volunteers also indicated a small increase in days in which they would walk.



On average, volunteers spent 50% more time engaged in vigorous and moderate activities over a week at the end of the three month study period when compared with the time spent at the start of the study period. Volunteers were spending a little more time walking too. Nine out of ten attribute their physical activity level to participation in Green Gym.



Interestingly although all volunteers – when interviewed – found it easy to articulate improvements in their mental wellbeing – changes in their physical health were more complex. Some volunteers suggest that improvements to physical health will simply mirror changes to mental wellbeing: **“I just feel better mentally, so I will feel better physically.”**

A number of volunteers equated being fitter with a change in dietary habits - eating more fresh vegetables and less junk food and take-aways. Two volunteers explain this as a result of growing vegetables themselves: **“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”**

For one volunteer, the promotion of healthy living that is part of the Green Gym ethos, helped support lifestyle change, when he was diagnosed with diabetes:

“I think finding out I was diabetic, I had to change my diet anyway, so I cut out all sweets and cakes and everything so that had a bearing on my weight loss, but here, not that I've become vegetarian, but here it is something that they advocate. Not saying they push it down your throat all the time, but a lot of people are vegetarian, but I think they do try and promote healthy eating and healthy lifestyle”

Participating in Green Gym increases physical activity levels and supports the development of food skills, providing the tools to improve diet and nutrition as well as impacting on volunteer's self-esteem and confidence to do so.



Section 12) Employability Skills

Employment Skills

Interviewed volunteers saw participation in Green Gym as an opportunity to get back into work. Many hoped 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.”

Green Gym supports transition into employment by providing structure and routine:

“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.”

Green Gym provides opportunities for leadership roles for volunteers at an early stage. Becoming a Volunteer Officer is viewed as a way to gain experience and a further step towards paid employment:

“I thought this would be a good opportunity, so I did it, but now, like seeing it like there's leadership opportunities so now I guess like it will give me experience hopefully, if I can get a leadership role.”

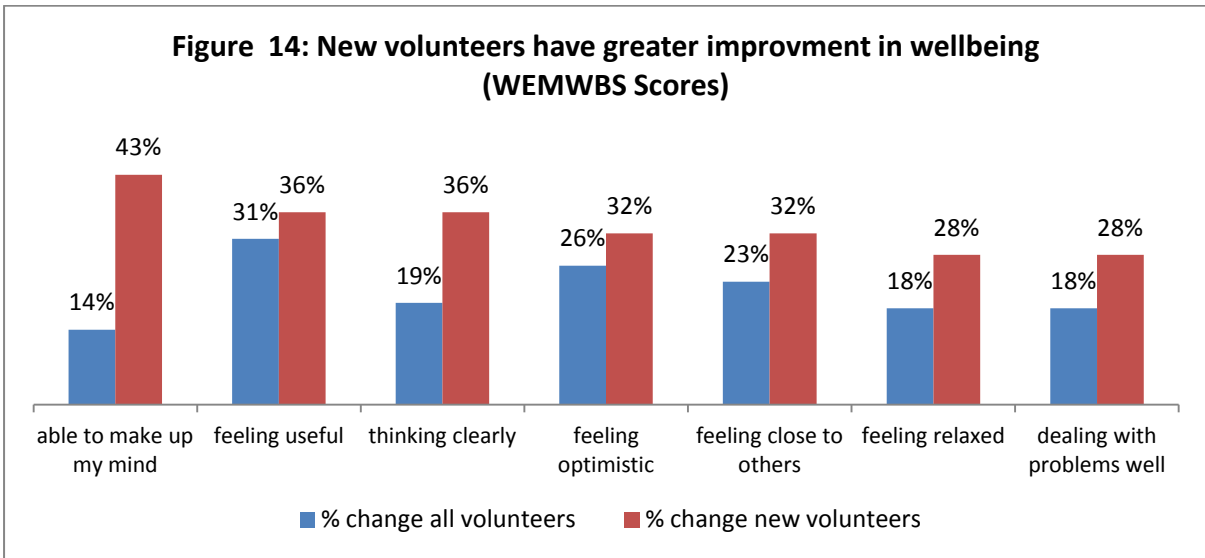
Getting back to work can be difficult. Green Gym volunteering can help restore confidence, teach new skills and establish a routine – helping people get their foot back on the job ladder. Moving from a Green Gym volunteering role to a Green Gym Volunteer Officer role and then on to paid employment in the local community is an established and successful route.



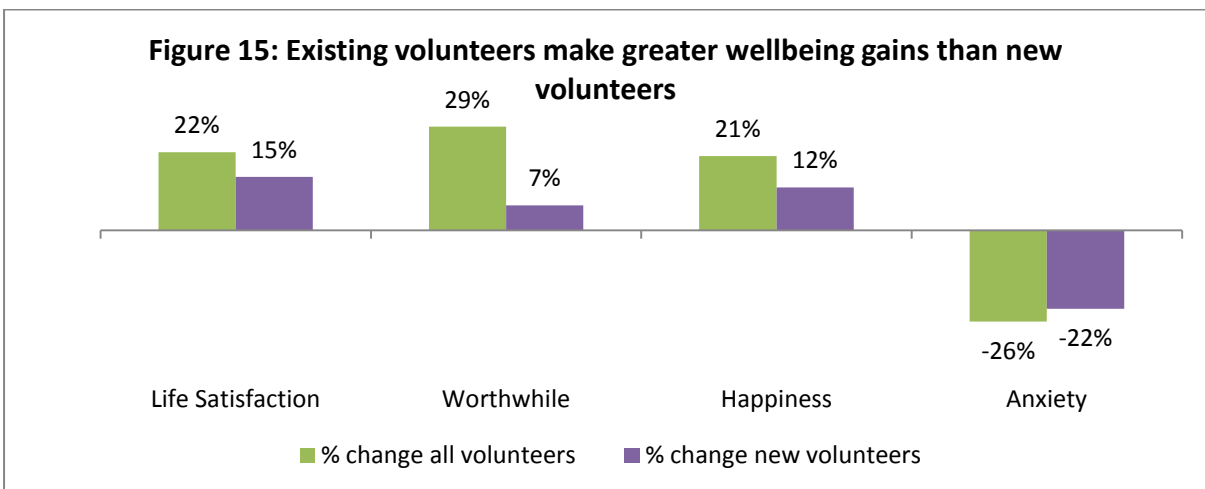
Section 13) New Volunteers

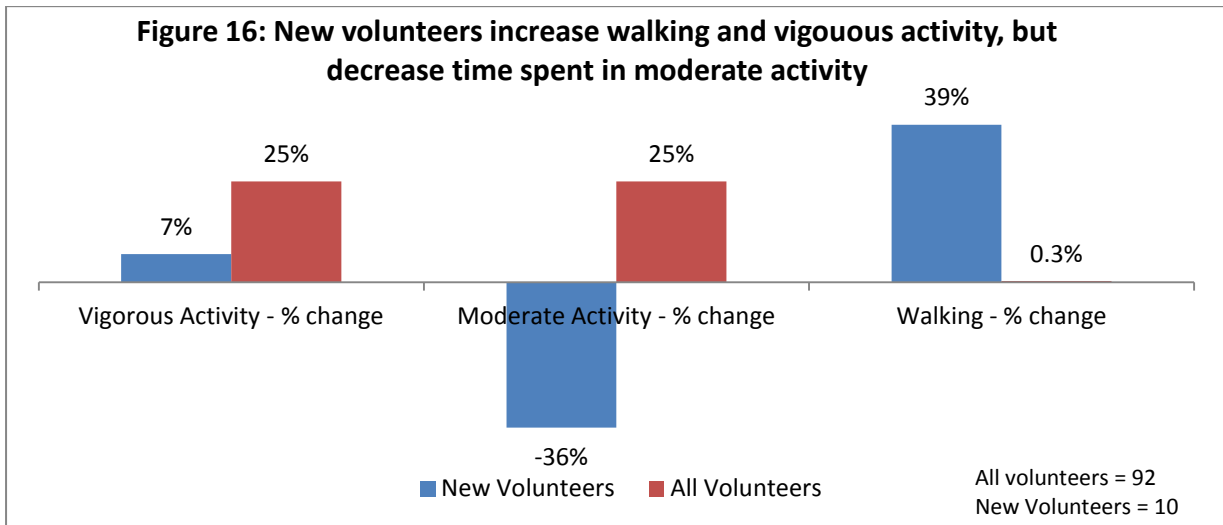
Ten volunteers taking part in the survey were new to Green Gym – attending for four weeks of less. Six of the ten new volunteers are women and seven are aged over 40. Half are living with long term health conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes and asthma and three are smokers. More than half are unemployed or retired. Two of the ten are from non-white ethnic minority groups.

New volunteers showed improvements in wellbeing on both WEMWBS and ONS Wellbeing questions. However– new volunteers showed a larger degree of improvement on WEMWBS scales, but a smaller degree of improvement on ONS wellbeing questions when compared with the sample as a whole.



One possible explanation is that WEMWBS and ONS Personal Wellbeing capture different elements of wellbeing. WEMWBS captures data on competence and how volunteers function on a personal and social level whereas ONS Personal Wellbeing captures more global assessments – evaluating life as a whole. It may be that a sense of competence and feeling connected to those around you change at a faster rate than broader assessments of life satisfaction and emotions such as happiness.





Interestingly, unlike other volunteers – those new to Green Gym greatly increased the amount of time spent walking and marginally increased the amount of time spent in vigorous activity, but decreased the amount of time spent in moderate activity. However – given the very small number of new volunteers included in this study (ten) all results (including wellbeing) are purely tentative.

To give a more insightful picture of the Green Gym journey, we interviewed six of the ten new volunteers at the start of their experience with Green Gym. Of these, four were interviewed a second time, after three months. We were unable to re-interview the remaining three – one had got a job and did not want to take part in the study, one was hospitalised and the other was non-contactable.

For our new volunteers finding respite, reducing isolation, finding purpose and creating routine, improving their social life and giving something back to the local community are key benefits from participating in Green Gym.

As a carer for her elderly mother Helen feels isolated and lonely. She has lost touch with friends and family and finds it difficult to make new contacts because of her caring responsibilities. Sometimes, the demands of being a carer get her down and she suffers with depression. Green Gym gives her a chance to have a life of her own, outside of her caring role: **“that is the one place I can go where there isn’t any... pressure, so it’s nice to go and just be [myself]”**

The ability to ‘be yourself’ at Green Gym and not be defined by your domestic responsibilities or past experiences was a strong theme.

Steve is an ex-offender, supported by a Green Gym referral partner during his re-entry into society following imprisonment. Steve experiences fear and distrust from others after they find out about his past convictions. The social stigma makes him feel low and he avoids people and places that are quick to stereotype him. At Green Gym, other volunteers don’t ask him about his past. This has given him the courage to communicate more: **“I find with myself, I’ve become a bit more confident, and I’m talking to people”**

Green Gym volunteering provides a new sense of purpose and pride in making the local environment a better place:

Despite being retired, Rachel is keen to keep learning new skills and meeting new people. She enjoys the exercise she gets at Green Gym relishing feeling tired but exhilarated at the difference her work has made: **“It’s fun to do, you can see what you’ve done...at the end of a session you can see the changes you’ve made as a group .. I didn’t realise it would be that significant to me until we’d done a couple of jobs where you could actually see a huge difference”**

As well as giving a connection to others and the local community, Green Gym offers a chance to reflect on inner most thoughts and feelings.

Tim is at a crossroads in his life. He’s left his job, become unemployed and feels in a state of turmoil. He struggles to make decisions about his life and future. Working outside with Green Gym he is able to think and plan – almost without realising it: **“I was working with the earth and nature – just tuning into what is right for me. It was really wonderful; I felt so at peace with myself...”**

Green Gym offers structure and routine. For one new volunteer, this has been crucial in his pathway back to work: **“...I didn’t really know what to do but the Green Gym gave me something, it gave me a solid commitment – I’ve got to be there on Monday and I’ve got to be there on Wednesday and I’d work the rest of my life around it – it felt like a nice introduction to getting back into the working world...and now I’ve been accepted on this job and I feel that Green Gym’s given me a structure to get up at a certain time in the morning and be somewhere...”**

Despite no prior experience before Green Gym, two of the new volunteers are thinking about working in horticulture or environmental activities.



A small number of new volunteers choose Green Gym because it offers a way to keep or increase fitness: **“...it gives me an opportunity to get some exercise...”** Even those who don’t join with increasing fitness in mind, recognise the benefits of being more physically active: **“... I feel much fitter and sometimes I feel a sort of a soreness - which is a good soreness, which means I’ve actually worked my muscles out. My arms, my shoulders really feel like they’ve had a workout afterwards and my figure, I feel much better about it... I feel good about my body shape and maybe it has toned up a little bit, ‘cos I have lost a little bit of weight as well, so maybe that could be part of Green Gym, ‘cos it’s quite intense physical activity and I’m not just doing it once a week, it’s twice a week, so it’s probably the Green Gym that’s done it.”**

Although when joining Green Gym none of our new volunteers set out to lose weight, there is a recognition that low mood can have a negative effect on food choices. Feeling better – as a result of participating in Green Gym – can facilitate more positive food choices: **“...when I isolate myself, my food and my diet go downhill – badly, and literally I will just sit at home and comfort eat. Being at [Green Gym] I’ve managed not to do that because of the [healthy] food there and you’re exercising while you’re there anyway...”**

All our new volunteers recognised the gains they had made as a result of participating in Green Gym and all planned to continue attending for as long as possible. However, weekday only Green Gyms can be incompatible with paid employment, making it difficult for those with jobs. Despite a large and vibrant employee engagement programme, weekend Green Gym volunteering options are limited: **“I’ll be working Monday to Friday normal office hours, it’s a bit tricky because Green Gym is always on weekdays, in the middle of the day as well, so it’s a shame to give it up, but I’ve got no choice...”** This volunteer would continue if Green Gym offered weekend sessions.



Section 14) Summary

Green Gym is effective in both improving and maintaining physical and mental health. Key mechanisms include increasing physical activity levels and reducing social isolation by creating opportunities for people to work together in worthwhile outdoor activities. Reducing social isolation, improving the local environment and developing key employability skills are highly valued by volunteers. Green Gyms increase resilience, creating healthier individuals and communities that are better able to support themselves. Development of an internal insight function and creation of robust outcome metrics will strengthen Green Gym's ability to continue to offer inclusive and tailored projects to meet a wide range of needs.







Section 7) Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire



TCV Green Gym National Survey (BASELINE)

Dear Green Gym participant,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey. The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) and NEF Consulting are working together, gathering evidence to demonstrate the value of providing Green Gym groups with the aim of improving both your health and the environment at the same time. The responses you give today will provide a key part of this understanding.

We estimate that completing this survey should take around 15 minutes. We will come back to you in 2016 to ask you to complete two shorter follow-up surveys.

We will treat all information that you give in confidence. When we report the findings of the evaluation we will not identify any individual. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact us by telephone or email, details are below.

Many thanks,

Joy

Joy Beishon

Head of Green Gym Research

E: j.beishon@email.tcv.org.uk

T: 020 3794 8021

M: 07855 807 083

1. Your consent:

	Yes	No
I consent to The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) re-contacting me to take part the follow-up surveys.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) re-contacting me to take part in further research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Respondent signature

Respondent name

Date

2. IF YOU TICKED 'NO' TO EITHER QUESTION, what is your reason for not taking part? (Please tick all that apply)

- I don't come to Green Gym very often
 - I'm not going to come to Green Gym in January and February 2016
 - I don't have time to take part
 - I need help to complete the questionnaire
 - I don't feel comfortable sharing information on a questionnaire
 - I don't have access to the internet/email account
 - Other (please specify):
-

Part A: About yourself....

This section collects information about you that enables us, and you, to track your progress overtime. Just a reminder that all answers you give will be treated in confidence and your answers will not be shared with a third party.

3. What is your full name? (please write in BLOCK CAPITALS)

4. What is the name of your Green Gym group?

- Abingdon Green Gym
 - Barnet Green Gym
 - Bromley Green Gym
 - Camden Green Gym - Thursday
 - Camden Green Gym - Tuesday
 - Darlaston Community Gardens
 - Hollybush - Friday gardening group
 - Hollybush - Wednesday Gardening group
 - Horsham Green Gym
 - Hounslow Pevensey Road
 - Lloyd Park Green Gym
 - Sonning Common Green Gym
 - Trafford Green Gym
 - Watford Cassiobury Green Gym
 - West Hampstead Green Gym
 - Whitehall Green Gym
 - Witton Country Park Green Gym
 - Other - Please give the name and postcode of your Green Gym group:
-

5. How long have you been attending a Green Gym regularly (i.e. once a month or more)?

- I'm new to Green Gyms*
- 1 - 4 weeks*
- 1 - 6 months*
- Between 6 months and 2 years*
- Between 2 and 5 years*
- Longer than 5 years*

6. How often have you attended a Green Gym over the last 2 months?

1. More than twice a week	2. About twice a week	3. About once a week	4. About once every two weeks	5. About once a month	6. About once every two months	7. Less than once every two months	8. This is my first time

7. What is your home postcode? (please write in BLOCK CAPITALS)

8. What is your date of birth? (DD/MM/YYYY)

9. Sex

1. Male	2. Female	3. I'd prefer not to say

10. Do you have any of the following physical health conditions or illnesses?

- High blood pressure*
 - High cholesterol*
 - Diabetes*
 - Overweight or obese*
 - Any other physical health condition or illness lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more (if so, please specify)*
-

11. Are you a smoker?

- Yes*
- No*
- Occasionally*

12. Do you have any of the following mental health conditions or illnesses?

- Depression and/or anxiety issues*
 - Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)*
 - Any other mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more (if so, please specify)*
-

13. Which of the following applies to you?

- Ex-service personnel*
- Ex-offender*
- Long-term unemployed i.e. unemployed for more than 6 months*
- Retired*

14. What is your ethnic group? Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background

White:

- British/ English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish*

- Irish*
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller*
- Any other White Background*

Mixed/ Multiple Ethnic Groups:

- White and Black Caribbean*
- White and Black African*
- White and Asian*
- Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background,*

Asian / Asian British:

- Indian*
- Pakistani*
- Bangladeshi*
- Chinese*
- Any other Asian background*

(See next page for further options)

Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British:

- African*
- Caribbean*
- Any other Black / African / Caribbean background*

Other Ethnic Group:

- Arab*
- Any other Ethnic Group*

15. Out of the following options, which best describes your highest level qualification? (please tick one)

- Degree, or Degree equivalent and above*

- Other educational qualification for which you received a certificate (E.g. Certificates of Higher Education, A/AS Levels, NVQs 1-4, GCSEs, Entry Level Certificates)*
- Any professional, vocational or other work-related qualification for which you received a certificate*
- No Qualifications*

16. Which of the below best describe your TOP THREE reasons for joining Green Gyms?

- to increase my physical fitness*
 - to increase my mental wellbeing*
 - to be outdoors more*
 - to meet like-minded people*
 - to give something back to my community*
 - to get involved with environmental conservation activities*
 - Other (please specify)*
-

17. Which of the below best describe your TOP THREE reasons for continuing to come to Green Gym?

- I want to increase or maintain my physical activity*
 - I want to increase or maintain my mental wellbeing*
 - I want to be outdoors more*
 - I want to meet like-minded people*
 - I want to give something back to my community*
 - I want to get involved with environmental conservation activities*
 - Other (please specify)*
-

18. Did any of the following organisations recommend Green Gyms for you personally and suggest you attend? (please tick all that apply)

- Social Services*
- NHS (e.g. your doctor or nurse)*

- Employment organisation (e.g. Jobcentre)*
- Training organisation (e.g. School, College or University)*
- Volunteering Agency*
- Other (please specify):*
-

Part B: Tracking your levels of activity...

This section is used to look at your levels of activity.

Think about all the **vigorous** activities that you did in the **last 7 days**. **Vigorous** physical activities refer to activities that take hard physical effort and make you breathe much harder than normal. Think only about those physical activities that you did for at least 10 minutes at a time.

- 19. During the last 7 days, on how many days did you do vigorous physical activities like heavy lifting, digging, aerobics, or fast bicycling?**

_____ days per week

- No vigorous physical activities → Skip to question 21*

- 20. How much time did you usually spend doing vigorous physical activities on one of those days?**

_____ hours per day

_____ minutes per day

- Don't know/Not sure*

Think about all the **moderate** activities that you did in the **last 7 days**. **Moderate** activities refer to activities that take moderate physical effort and make you breathe somewhat harder than normal. Think only about those physical activities that you did for at least 10 minutes at a time.

- 21. During the last 7 days, on how many days did you do moderate physical activities like carrying light loads, bicycling at a regular pace, or doubles tennis? Do not include walking.**

_____ days per week

- No moderate physical activities → Skip to question 23*

- 22. How much time did you usually spend doing moderate physical activities on one of those days?**

_____ hours per day

_____ minutes per day

Don't know/Not sure

Think about the time you spent **walking** in the **last 7 days**. This includes at work and at home, walking to travel from place to place, and any other walking that you have done solely for recreation, sport, exercise, or leisure.

23. During the last 7 days, on how many days did you walk for at least 10 minutes at a time?

_____ days per week

No walking → Skip to question 25

24. How much time did you usually spend walking on one of those days?

_____ hours per day

_____ minutes per day

Don't know/Not sure

The last question is about the time you spent **sitting** on weekdays during **the last 7 days**. Include time spent at work, at home, while doing course work and during leisure time. This may include time spent sitting at a desk, visiting friends, reading, or sitting or lying down to watch television.

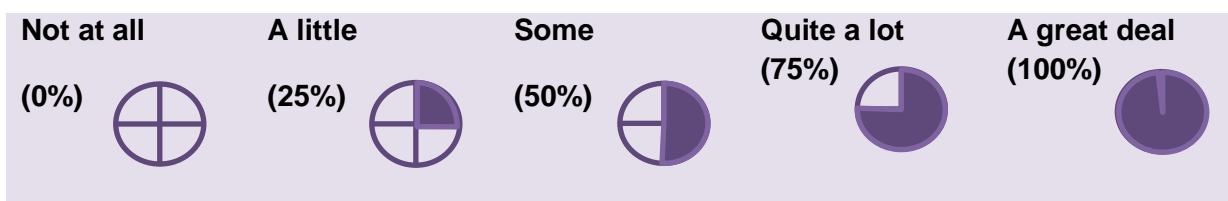
25. During the last 7 days, how much time did you spend sitting on a week day?

_____ hours per day

_____ minutes per day

Don't know/Not sure

26. To what extent do you think your level of physical activity is related to your participation in Green Gym activities?



Part C: Tracking your wellbeing...

This section is used to look at your personal and social wellbeing.

27. Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts. Please tick the box that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks.

	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time	Don't know
I've been feeling optimistic about the future						
I've been feeling useful						
I've been feeling relaxed						
I've been dealing with problems well						
I've been thinking clearly						
I've been feeling close to other people						
I've been able to make up my own mind about things						

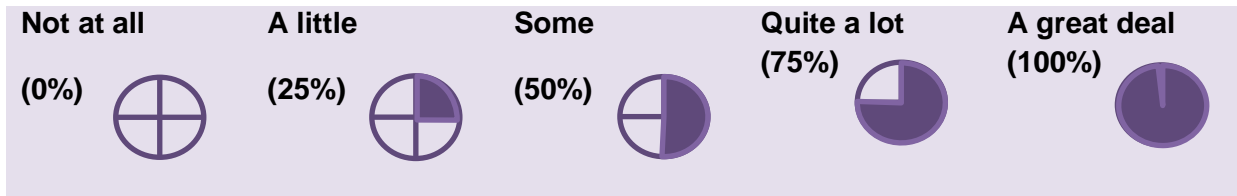
28. Now, how would you have answered these same questions before you joined Green Gyms?

NOTE: SKIP THIS QUESTION IF YOU HAVE BEEN ATTENDING GREEN GYMS FOR LONGER THAN 2 YEARS.

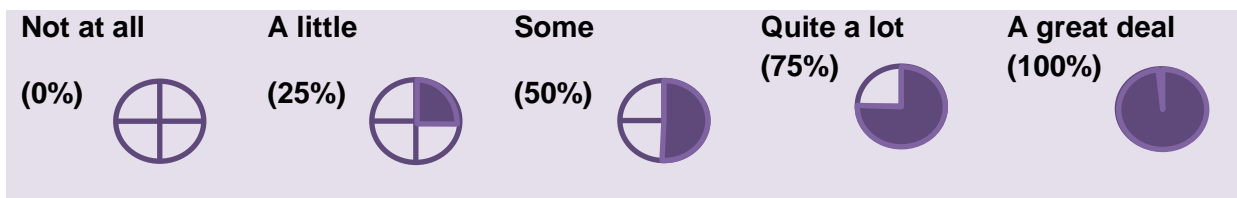
	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time	Don't know
I've been feeling optimistic about the future						
I've been feeling useful						
I've been feeling relaxed						

I've been dealing with problems well						
I've been thinking clearly						
I've been feeling close to other people						
I've been able to make up my own mind about things						

29. Thinking about your answers above, to what extent do you think your wellbeing is related to your participation in Green Gym activities?



30. Thinking about your answers above, to what extent do you think your wellbeing is as a result of being outdoors participating in Green Gym activities? i.e. Would you have experienced the same wellbeing levels if you had participated in a similar indoor activity or community group?



Some further personal wellbeing questions.

- 31. Overall, how satisfied are you with your life?** Please use a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all satisfied and 10 is completely satisfied, to answer the following questions.

<i>Not at all satisfied</i>						<i>Completely satisfied</i>				
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- 32. Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?** Please use a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all worthwhile and 10 is completely worthwhile, to answer the following questions.

<i>Not at all worthwhile</i>						<i>Completely worthwhile</i>				
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- 33. Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?** Please use a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all happy and 10 is completely happy, to answer the following questions.

<i>Not at all happy</i>						<i>Completely happy</i>				
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- 34. Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?** Please use a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is completely anxious and 10 is not at all anxious, to answer the following questions.

<i>Completely anxious</i>						<i>Not at all anxious</i>				
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Now, how would you have answered these same questions before you joined Green Gym?

NOTE: SKIP QUESTIONS 34 – 37 IF YOU HAVE BEEN ATTENDING GREEN GYMS FOR LONGER THAN 2 YEARS.

- 35. Thinking about before you joined Green Gym - overall, how satisfied were you with your life?** Please use a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all satisfied and 10 is completely satisfied, to answer the following questions.

<i>Not at all satisfied</i>											<i>Completely satisfied</i>
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

- 36. Thinking about before you joined Green Gym - overall, to what extent did you feel the things you did in your life were worthwhile?** Please use a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all worthwhile and 10 is completely worthwhile, to answer the following questions.

<i>Not at all worthwhile</i>											<i>Completely worthwhile</i>
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

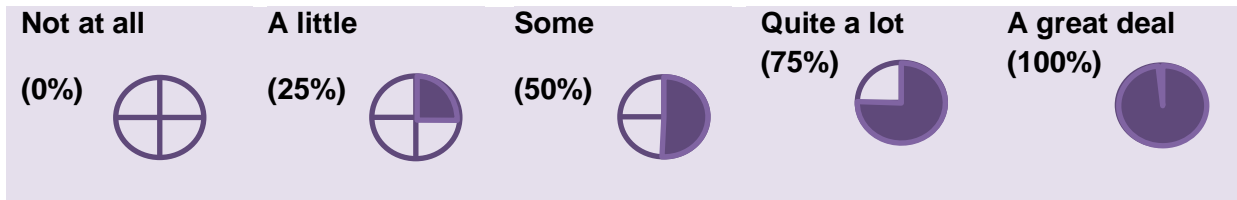
- 37. Thinking about before you joined Green Gym - overall, how happy did you feel?** Please use a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all happy and 10 is completely happy, to answer the following questions.

<i>Not at all happy</i>											<i>Completely happy</i>
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

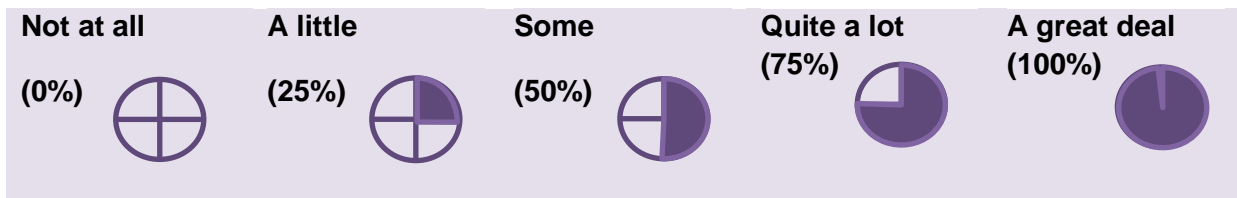
- 38. Thinking about before you joined Green Gym - overall, how anxious did you feel?** Please use a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is completely anxious and 10 is not at all anxious, to answer the following questions.

<i>Completely anxious</i>											<i>Not at all anxious</i>
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

39. Thinking about your previous answers, overall to what extent do you think your feelings of satisfaction, worthwhileness, happiness and anxiety are related to your participation in Green Gym?



40. Thinking about your previous answers, overall to what extent do you think your feelings of satisfaction, worthwhileness, happiness and anxiety are a result of being outdoors? i.e. Would you have experienced the same wellbeing levels if you had participated in a similar indoor activity or community group?

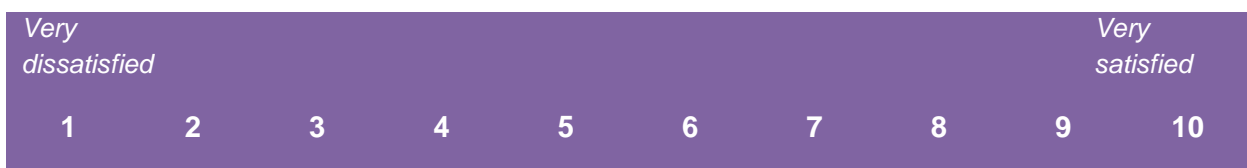


The next questions are about your social wellbeing.

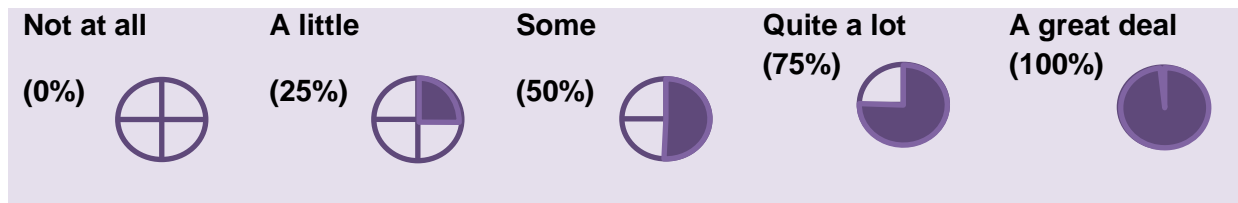
41. Could you please tell me on a scale of 1 to 10 how satisfied you are with your social life, where 1 means you are very dissatisfied and 10 means you are very satisfied?



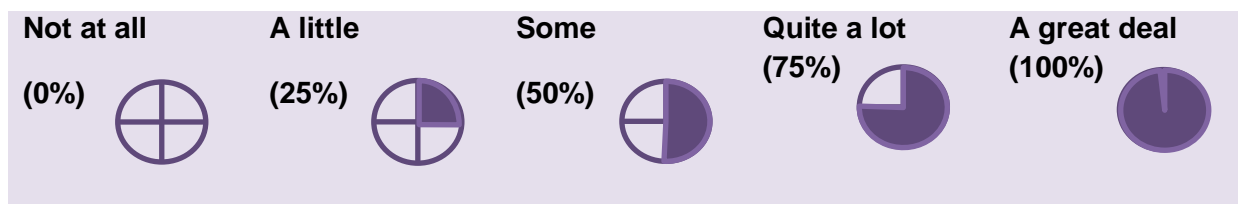
**42. Now, how would you have answered this same question before you joined Green Gyms?
NOTE: SKIP THIS QUESTION IF YOU HAVE BEEN ATTENDING GREEN GYMS FOR LONGER THAN 2 YEARS.**



43. Thinking about your answers above, to what extent do you think your social wellbeing is related to your participation in Green Gym activities?



44. Thinking about your answers above, to what extent do you think your social wellbeing is as a result of being outdoors participating in Green gym activities?

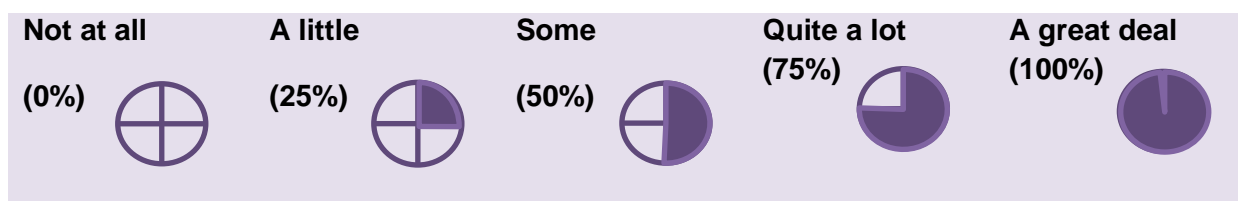


Now, a question about the wider local area around your Green Gym – the area within 15-20 minutes walking distance.

45. To what extent would you agree or disagree that people in this neighbourhood pull together to improve the neighbourhood?

- Definitely agree
- Tend to agree
- Tend to disagree
- Definitely disagree
- Nothing needs improving
- Don't know

46. Thinking about your answer above, to what extent do you think it is related to your participation in Green Gym?



Thank you for taking part in this survey!

Appendix B: Topic Guide for Volunteer Interviews

Interview schedule for volunteers	
Past	
Question	Prompts
How did you find out about GG?	Pathway (organisational) Personal / community relationships Media/local press/opportunistic
IF REFERRED/SIGNPOSTED/ADVISED BY AGENCY OR 3 RD PARTY: Who/ which agency referred/signposted/advised you to come to GG?	Do you still see (referrer)? Why?
IF REFERRED/SIGNPOSTED BY AGENCY OR 3 RD PARTY: What did they tell you about GG?	How did that make you feel? Encouraged/motivated/nervous/unsure/other
Have you ever done anything like GG?	Activity before GG
How were you feeling before you started coming to GG?	Physically/psychologically/life & family 'issues'/social connectivity/other?
What were you hoping to get from GG?	How/in what way? What outcomes - Physical activity, mental health, social connection, giving something back
Present	
How often do you come to GG?	Why? Would you like to come more/less often?
What do you like most about GG?	Why?
Is there anything that would make it even better for you?	Why?
How have you been feeling since you started coming to GG?	Why do you think you have been feeling like that?
Do you think that GG has contributed to any changes in your life?	How/in what way? What outcomes - physical activity, mental health, social connection, giving something back/other?
Future	
Are you planning to continue coming to GG? IF YES: What are you hoping to get from continuing to come to GG?	How/in what way? What outcomes - physical activity, mental health, social connection, giving something back
IF REFERRED/SIGNPOSTED/ADVISED TO ATTEND GG BY AGENCY OR 3 RD PARTY: How much does your GP/Nurse/Social Worker know about how you have been feeling since coming to GG?	How is information transmitted – formally/informally and by whom? If no feedback given would volunteer like to share feedback with referring agency? If yes – what outcomes and how?
Would you recommend GG to others/friend/family	Why/why not?

Appendix C: Topic Guide for Referral Agencies

Interview schedule – referral agencies

Referral process and feedback	
Question	Prompts
How did you first hear about Green Gym?	Professional/ personal / community contacts/conference/media
When did you first start sending clients to GG?	Why? What led you to use GG this time?
What process do you use?	Signposting (use of website/hard copy)/formal referral (advance contact with GG leader), other methods
If you could – what changes would you make to this process?	Why? Speed/time/efficiency/cost effectiveness/reporting
Thinking about xxx [name of client] what sort of feedback do you receive from the GG about xxx?	Useful? Why/how do you receive the feedback
What sort of feedback would you like?	Why? Attendance/distance travelled/specific outcomes?
What sort of feedback do you get from xxx about their GG experience?	Useful?Why/how How often they attend
What sort of information would you like to receive from xxx about their GG experience?	Why? How often they attend/changes in wellbeing/physical activity/new friendships/other
Reason for Referral/Signposting and Benefits	
Why did you think GG would be a good option for xxx?	What were you hoping that GG was going to do for xxx? To you knowledge - had xxx ever done anything like GG before?/What were their physical activity levels?
(If you've had contact with xxx since they joined GG) – would you say they have benefited from Green Gym?	What and why? Physical activity/psychological wellbeing/social engagement
Do you think that GG has contributed to any positive changes in xxx's life?	What/How?
Perceptions of Green Gym	
Thinking about your client groups – which groups do you think would benefit most from GG?	Why? In what way? Disease groups/physical/mental health/age groups/socio-economic groups/disadvantaged groups
What do you like most about GG?	Why?
Is there anything you dislike?	Why?
Is there anything that GG could do better?	What?How?
Are you planning to continue referring to GG?	Why?

Appendix D: NESTA Levels of Evidence

