

# Volunteering Impacts



A report highlighting recent work undertaken by TCV to better understand the full impact of volunteering

March 2014



**John laing**  
making infrastructure happen



# Contents

**Foreword .....3**

**Executive Summary.....4**

**Background .....5**

**Key Findings .....5**

**Green Impacts .....6**

**Influencing the adoption of environmentally friendly lifestyles .....8**

    The questions being addressed ..... 8

    The Approach to Finding Answers ..... 8

    Answers and Insights ..... 9

**Improving Health and Wellbeing ..... 16**

    The Question Being Addressed.....16

    The Approach to Finding Answers .....16

    Answers and Insights .....16

**A CASE STUDY: The Penge Green Gym ..... 18**

**Quotes from Green Gym Participants..... 20**

**Community Resilience ..... 21**

    The Question Being Addressed.....21

    The Approach to Finding Answers .....21

    Answers and Insights .....21

**A CASE STUDY: Resilience interview with Boston Manor Park Local Group.....22**

**A CASE STUDY: Belsize Community Group..... 24**

**Conclusions.....27**

This report has been drafted on behalf of TCV by Mike King of Resources for Change.  
www.r4c.org.uk  
mikek@r4c.org.uk  
07590 802239

Resources for Change is a sustainable development consultancy working to improve individuals, organisations and communities relationship with the environment

The author would like to thank the many people in TCV and partner organisations for their cooperation and contributions in helping to put this report together.



**Volunteering in Bromley**

## Foreword



I am proud to be the Chair of The Conservation Volunteers for many reasons, and one of the most important is the organisation's commitment to empower our volunteers to realise their full potential.

For over 50 years, TCV has been working with communities and individuals to improve outdoor places through volunteering. TCV's vision is an abundance of safe and accessible outdoor places for everyone to use and enjoy through working together to transform their health, prospects and outdoor places.

I believe that understanding the benefits and impacts of volunteering and the factors that influence these is of vital importance for our organisation that supports a network of over 2,000 community groups and actively support communities – every day, and all across the UK – to take responsibility for their local environment.

It is simple to record the impact of volunteering in terms, for example, of the number of trees planted or tasks undertaken, but it has been much more challenging to measure other benefits such as personal development, health or behaviour change.

For the past three years TCV have been running the Green Impacts Project. This action research project has set out to better understand and record whether an involvement in outdoor activity influences the development of more environmentally friendly lifestyles for individuals and leads to greater community resilience for groups. The report of this work begins to link these findings with our wider work on the impacts of volunteering on individual health and wellbeing. The work also complements a series

of research projects on the role of citizen science, which TCV is developing with Universities in Scotland and England.

The report shows that TCV and volunteering has a key role to play in building community resilience and encouraging individuals and community groups to improve their own surroundings, their health and their skills. Volunteering has a long and distinguished record in UK society. It contributes in a very big way to the social structure and the enjoyment and understanding of our surroundings. It creates opportunities for involvement, friendship and real personal achievement as a contributor to community goals. It is especially pertinent at a time when public budgets are severely challenged and it is increasingly the case that communities are being encouraged to take more responsibility for their own surroundings and their futures.

I would like to thank the funders of this research work: The City Bridge Trust, John Laing PLC and The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. In that sense this is a 'work in progress' report as the questions raised by the Green Impacts research are as important as the results it provides. To realise our volunteers full potential we will need to work closely with our partners to build on this research to engage and empower our volunteers and create more resilient communities.

**Rita Clifton CBE**

*Chair, The Conservation Volunteers*

# Executive Summary

In the last Community Life Survey commissioned by the Cabinet Office, twenty nine per cent of people interviewed said they had volunteered formally at least once in the last year<sup>1</sup>. With roughly one in three of the adult population of England volunteering on a regular basis, volunteers represent an invaluable resource that creates a huge economic and social value for our society. Volunteering is an integral part of UK society but it is clear that the true impact and benefits are still to be fully realised. Such personal engagement needs to be better qualified and quantified to realise the full impact and release the full potential of volunteering.

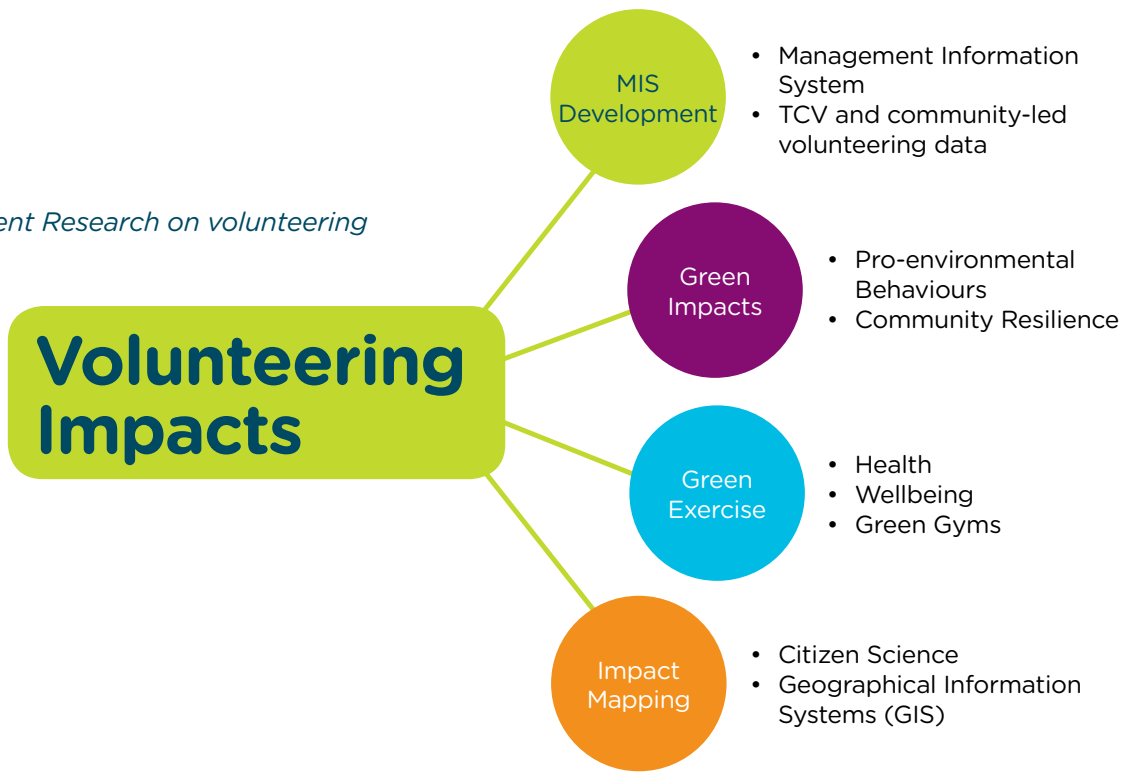
Our research and report focuses on the self-reported impact of volunteering that often goes underestimated. The report looks not only at the impacts of volunteering on individual health, wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviour, but also the impact on communities and society.

The research shows that volunteering has a positive impact on an individual's health and wellbeing; on the local environment through collective pro-environmental behaviour change and quality green spaces better managed from local communities; and for the whole community in improved social cohesion and resilience.

As the latest extreme weather events have shown, when local communities gather together and create connections, like in the case of TCV's Community Network, the effects of their activities are multiplied many times over.

With our primary focus on volunteering and community development, TCV will play a key role in realising and sharing these impacts of volunteering.

Fig. 1  
TCV Current Research on volunteering



1] Community Life Survey: August 2012 –April 2013 available for download at the Cabinet Office website <http://communitylife.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/>. Formal volunteering is defined as giving unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations to benefit other people or the environment. Informal volunteering is defined as giving unpaid help as an individual to people who are not relatives.

## BACKGROUND

The Green Impacts research is part of a bigger picture of research and learning that TCV is in the process of undertaking to better understand and articulate the full value of volunteering in an outdoor environment. This includes significant collaboration with research institutes in Scotland and England examining the role of volunteering in citizen science programmes. This work is summarised in Fig. 1.

For those wanting to explore the research in more depth, the data, case studies and audio-visual materials can be explored at [www.tcv.org.uk/volunteeringimpacts](http://www.tcv.org.uk/volunteeringimpacts).

## KEY FINDINGS

### MOTIVATION FOR VOLUNTEERING

The research found that while at the beginning the most important motivation for volunteering was 'to improve the environment' after volunteering with TCV for 10 sessions other motivations appear to be more important for the volunteers, such as 'enjoy working outdoors' and 'meet new people'. Understanding the volunteers' motivations is critical and will enable TCV and all other managers of volunteer programmes to innovate, tailor and adapt programmes to better respond to volunteers' needs and maximise their potential.

### PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Results show that involvement in volunteering has a positive impact on attitudes and behaviours towards the environment, lifestyles and willingness to engage in their local community. Furthermore, the impact increases over time.

However, this is a complex picture. Our analysis shows that there are numerous factors influencing the volunteers' ability and willingness to change behaviour or approach. Gender, ethnicity, age, socio-economic background, and the different types of volunteering activities all play significant parts. For example, positive change was more evident in women than men, in the 25 - 54 age range than either the younger or older age groups (see Fig. 4).

Volunteers from the most deprived areas on the Index of Multiple Deprivation show the most change as a result of their volunteering experience, with the most significant change in their engagement with their local community.

This understanding of the factors triggering pro-environmental behaviours will enable TCV and others to customise both the support on offer to individuals and the programmes that we deliver.

### WELLBEING

Comparing the results of thousands of surveys using multiple tools our analysis shows a significant percentage of individuals reporting an increase in overall wellbeing, physical and mental health through volunteering. Research also found that health improvements were greatest amongst those with the poorest health.

Research also suggests that volunteers who are given training and progress into positions of responsibility report even greater improvements in physical health, mental health and wellbeing.

### RESILIENCE

Volunteering with TCV, as with most similar organisations, is predominately a group activity and all the individuals surveyed through this study have been part of a Community or TCV-led group. The final part of the report focuses on the impacts of volunteering for the wider community.

The research found that community resilience could be enhanced by individual participation in group volunteering. The main attributes identified by TCV groups as essential are: activity, self-organisation, connectedness and skills and knowledge.

These findings are critical in informing how we support our Community Network and nurture these essential attributes when establishing and supporting new Green Gyms and Community Groups.

## Green Impacts

To promote the value of volunteering TCV has developed a powerful management information system to collect quantitative data on both volunteering effort and activity. TCV's current Strategic Plan identifies the need to improve the measurement of "qualitative impact across the broad range of its work so its achievements can be properly articulated". A review carried out by Mike King of Resources for Change in 2010 to ascertain the contribution that volunteering was making to sustainable development identified that there were two potential gaps in the data collection process; the development of pro-environmental behaviours and the contribution local volunteer groups make to the wider community. This meant that the true value of the volunteering process was being underreported.

The Green Impacts Project was established to fill this gap in knowledge with three key objectives:

- 1) Inspire greener living and environmentally friendly lifestyles**
- 2) Develop and pilot an assessment tool for TCV to determine if their approach to volunteering led to the development of pro-environmental behaviours**
- 3) Develop a methodology to test the belief that local volunteer groups can enhance community resilience**

To achieve the first objective TCV recruited 23 Greener Living Champions, delivered 43 Greener Living Workshops and Events and worked with 32 community groups to complete 87 Individual Action Plans. The research took place in London and, for the study of volunteering impacts on pro-environmental behaviour, surveyed volunteers from eight Action Teams and eight Green Gyms across the city. The community resilience component of the research worked with over 20 local community groups to develop an understanding of what made them resilient.

This report aims to summarise the key findings from objectives 2, and 3 and present the insights and learning that come from these findings. TCV engaged consultant Mike King (Resources for

Change) who drafted this report and supported the project providing the theory, background, analysis and tools.

For those wanting to explore the research in more depth, the data, case studies and individual action plans can be explored at:

[www.tcv.org.uk/volunteeringimpacts](http://www.tcv.org.uk/volunteeringimpacts)

### OUR THREE KEY OBJECTIVES:

- 1) Inspire greener living and environmentally friendly lifestyles**
- 2) Develop and pilot an assessment tool for TCV to determine if their approach to volunteering led to the development of pro-environmental behaviours**
- 3) Develop a methodology to test the belief that local volunteer groups can enhance community resilience**



Re-fuelling!

# Influencing the adoption of environmentally friendly lifestyles

## THE QUESTIONS BEING ADDRESSED

“Does involvement in volunteering help to develop attitudes and behaviours that will have a positive impact on the environment and society beyond the immediate volunteering experience?”

“If this proves to be the case, what are the factors that make this more or less likely?”

The attitudes and behaviours that were considered pertinent to this research fall into two distinct groupings:

- Those that could be described as characteristics of an ‘environmentally friendly lifestyle’ such as energy use, transport choices, waste and recycling, material consumption and food growing.
- Those that could be described as ‘civic engagement’ such as care for the local environment, involvement in community activities and participation in local decision-making.

## THE APPROACH TO FINDING ANSWERS

The Green Impacts Project adopted an approach first developed by WWF and CAG Consulting called the Change! Tool, based on the behaviour change cycle developed by James Prochaska and Carlo DiClements in the 1980s.

Their model is based on a cycle of behaviour change with the following steps:

- Pre-contemplation – a person has not yet decided that the change you are proposing is relevant to them.

- Contemplation – something happens to prompt a person to start thinking about a possible change, but they are still not committed to that change.
- Action – a person begins to plan a change. They may be learning new skills and finding out information.
- Maintenance – the change has been integrated into the person’s life; it is lasting and well practiced. At this point we exit the cycle entirely, or we may go into:
- Lapse or relapse – either temporary or permanent reversion to the pre-change behaviour.

The Change! Tool uses a set of questions that are based around sustainable lifestyle choices and focuses on measuring where volunteers are on a cycle of behaviour. For more information about the Change! Tool and the theory behind it visit [www.community-engagement.org.uk](http://www.community-engagement.org.uk).

TCV had previously been involved in field trials for the Change! Tool and that experience enabled the development of a ‘Green Impacts’ specific Behaviour Change Survey. Box 1 provides an illustration of the type of questions contained within the survey, a full copy of which can be found at [www.tcv.org.uk/volunteeringimpacts](http://www.tcv.org.uk/volunteeringimpacts)

### Box 1: Waste

- ☐ I do not think there is a connection between the waste I produce and the environment.
- ☐ I do think there is a connection between the waste I produce and the environment but I don’t recycle.
- ☐ I consider the environment when throwing things away
- ☐ I recycle/compost some of my waste.
- ☐ I recycle/compost most of my waste.
- ☐ I recycle/compost all of the recyclable and compostable material in my waste.

Surveys were undertaken at regular intervals during a person's engagement with TCV. A baseline survey was undertaken at the first point of contact with a TCV project and then subsequent surveys were undertaken after completing four volunteering tasks and again after 10 tasks. To better understand the factors that might be influencing any reported behaviour change, a qualitative component to the research was developed. Interviews with volunteers were undertaken to explore in more depth the motivations behind the behaviour change.

## ANSWERS AND INSIGHTS

### **Behaviour towards environmentally friendly lifestyles can be influenced by involvement in volunteering.**

The Green Impacts Project has been able to analyse data from 1,059 surveys (784 baseline surveys, 202 Second surveys 73 third surveys).

From this it is possible to calculate the number of steps of change (a step being a movement from one question to another in a particular

category) and whether these have been positive or negative.

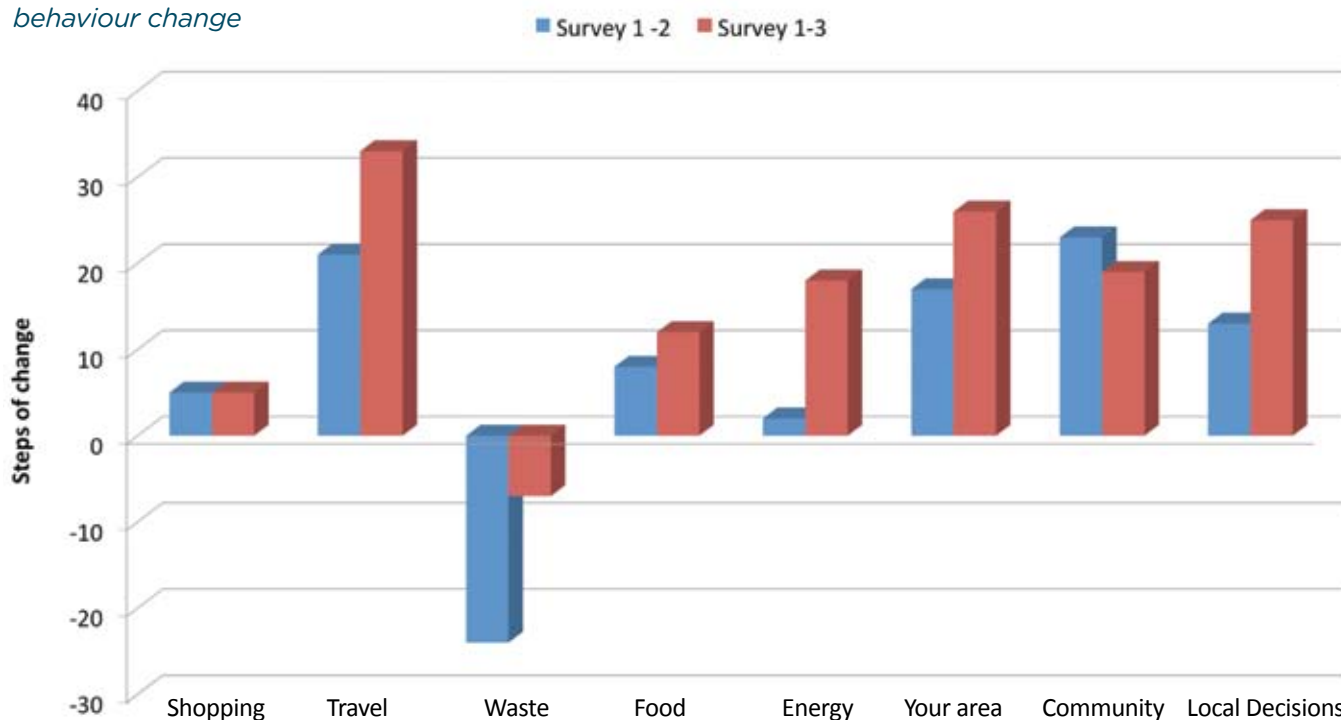
Fig. 2 below shows the self-reported behaviour change between the first and second surveys and between the first and third surveys. These results suggest that involvement in volunteering is having a positive impact upon people's attitudes and behaviours towards the environmental impact of their lifestyles and their willingness to engage in their locality. It is also apparent that the amount of change that individuals report develops overtime, factors that will be explored in more depth in the next section.

### **Volunteering appears to promote more change in certain areas than in others.**

Volunteering is a process of active involvement therefore it perhaps should not be surprising that it engenders an interest in local civic engagement. Volunteers reported in the interviews a wider appreciation of what voluntary action could achieve and a growing confidence to get involved.

Travel is another area where volunteers reported

Fig. 2  
*Self-reported pro-environmental behaviour change*



that their behaviour had changed. The interviews suggest that peer pressure and the example set by TCV in its use of sustainable transport were key factors; it would be useful to undertake further research to ascertain the significance of these influencing factors.

The negative result for waste is intriguing, as recycling and waste reduction are well established environmental behaviours. Interviews suggest that when volunteers undertook the baseline survey felt that they were doing as much as they could and were also frustrated that there were not the opportunities and facilities for them to do more.

**“After volunteering David feels more comfortable with the topic of environment. He would like to get more of the people in his building recycling properly and raise awareness among his neighbours”.**

### Change increases over time!

The headline figures showed that the amount of change that occurred was greater between survey 1 and 3 than it was between 1 and 2 which

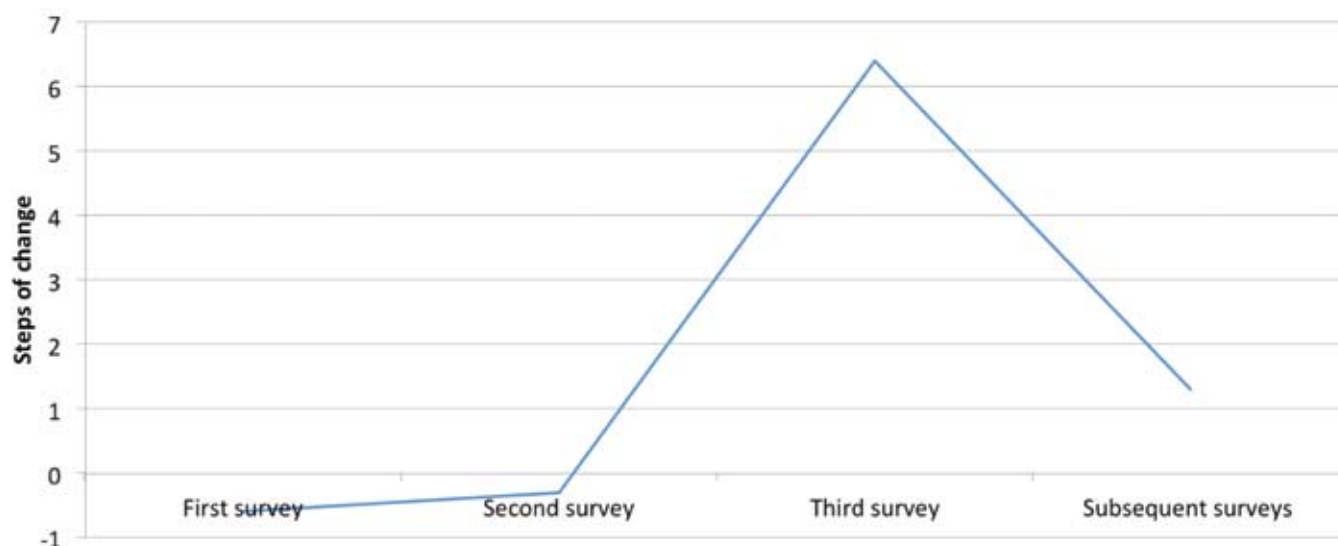
suggests that the length of time or the amount of volunteering is an important factor in influencing behaviour change.

The graph, in Fig. 3 below, shows the average number of steps of change reported per person related to the number of tasks they have been involved with.

The interview results also indicate that there is a recalibration process going on. Volunteers often feel that they are taking action to create a more environmentally friendly lifestyle and in fact, in many cases, they see volunteering as part of this process). However, the volunteering process lets them see a bigger picture of environmental concerns and perhaps causes them to compare themselves with other volunteers they meet. They take this into account when completing the second survey. By the time of the third survey, volunteers have identified the changes they need to make and have developed the confidence and the skills to make the change and hence the greater change.

Fig. 3

*Self-reported average steps of pro-environmental behaviour change*



“Although already environmentally conscious, Rhian felt that volunteering with TCV has kept her more in touch with nature and has encouraged her to think of new ways of living in a more sustainable way”.

Rhian, Green Impacts Greener Living Champion

### External factors play a key role

The Green Impacts Project looked at a number of factors related to the participant completing the survey, to determine how people’s lives outside of their voluntary role might affect their ability and willingness to change. The following key points emerged:

- Gender differences were evident with women reporting three ‘steps of change’ and men only one between the first and third surveys.
- Women were more likely to have got involved in helping to organise community events and participation in local decision-making, while men focused on practical activity in their locality.
- Both women and men were willing and able to make changes to their transport choices.

Positive change was more evident in the 25–54 age range than either the younger or older age groups, as illustrated by Fig. 4, and was the case across all of the behaviour change categories. This is an interesting result as this is arguably the age range that has most impact on the environment through their work and family life. Consequently behaviour change in this area could have considerable impact.

In terms of ethnicity, volunteers who described themselves as from a non-white ethnic background were much more likely to get involved in organising community activity than their white fellow volunteers, but appeared less inclined to address issues to do with an environmentally friendly lifestyle, as shown in Fig. 5, overleaf.

“The new skills and increased environmental awareness led to Philip assisting his auntie and baby cousin with their garden as she does not have spare time. This has had a positive impact on Philip’s family who are encouraged by his new skills”.

Phone interview with a TCV volunteer

Fig. 4  
*Impact of age on pro-environmental behaviour change*

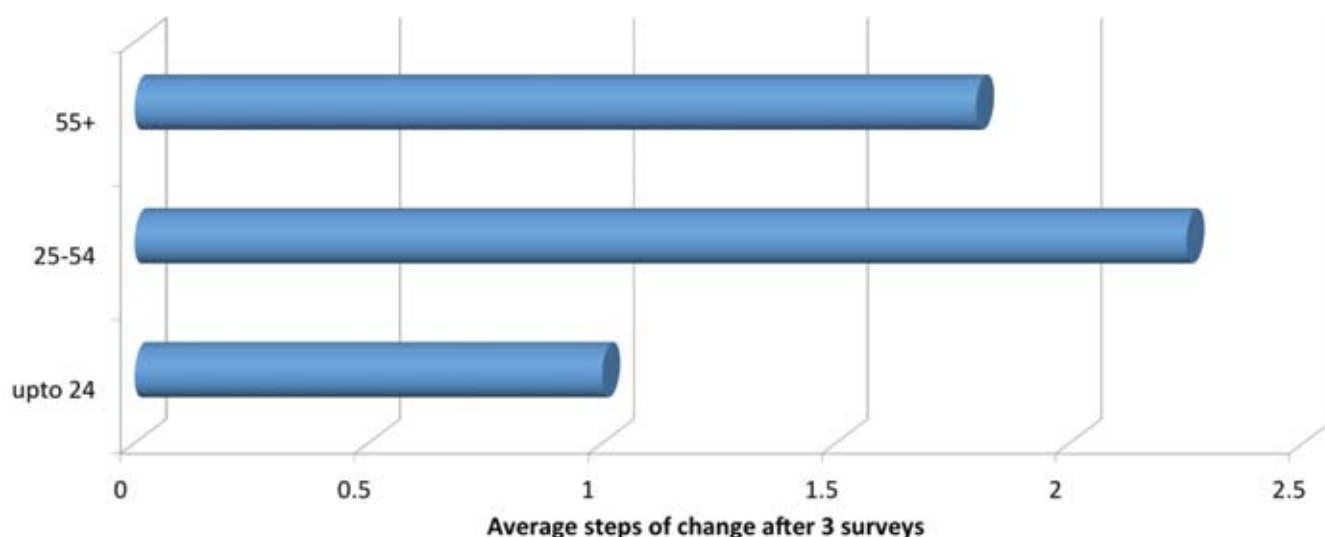


Fig.5  
Impact of ethnicity on pro-environmental behaviour change

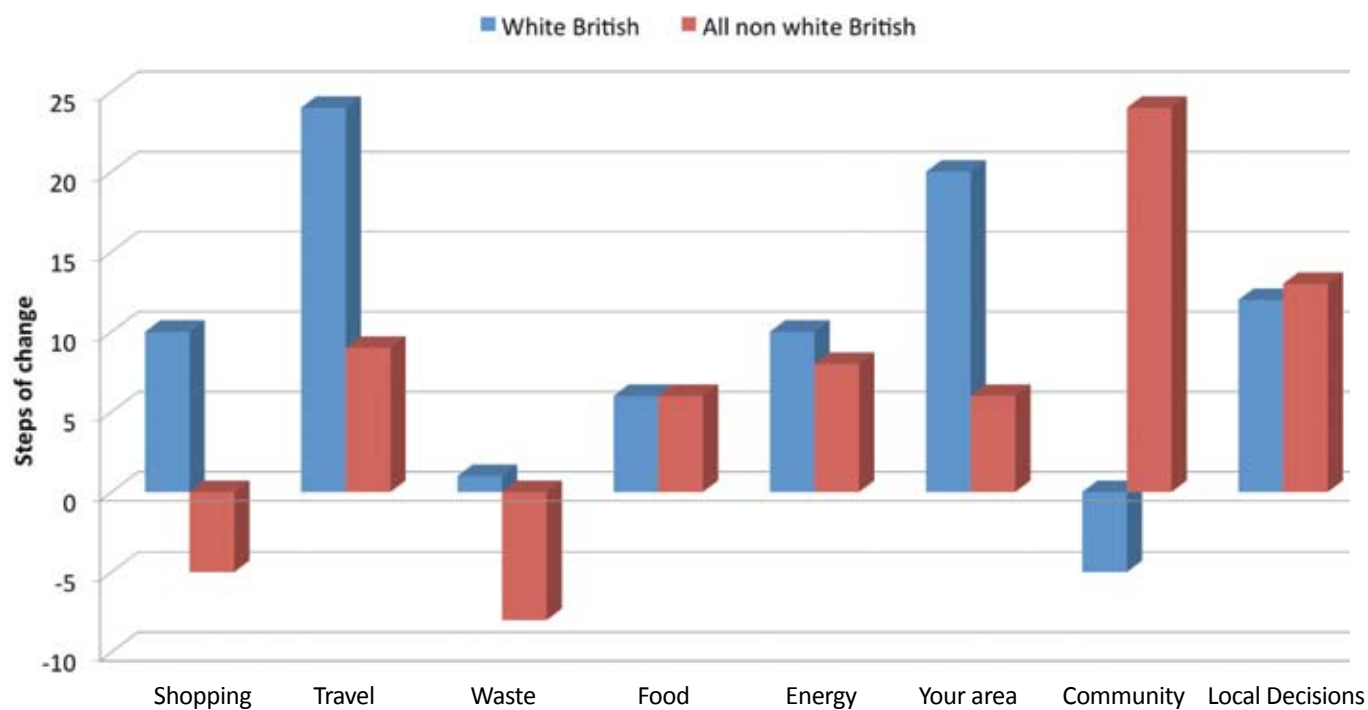
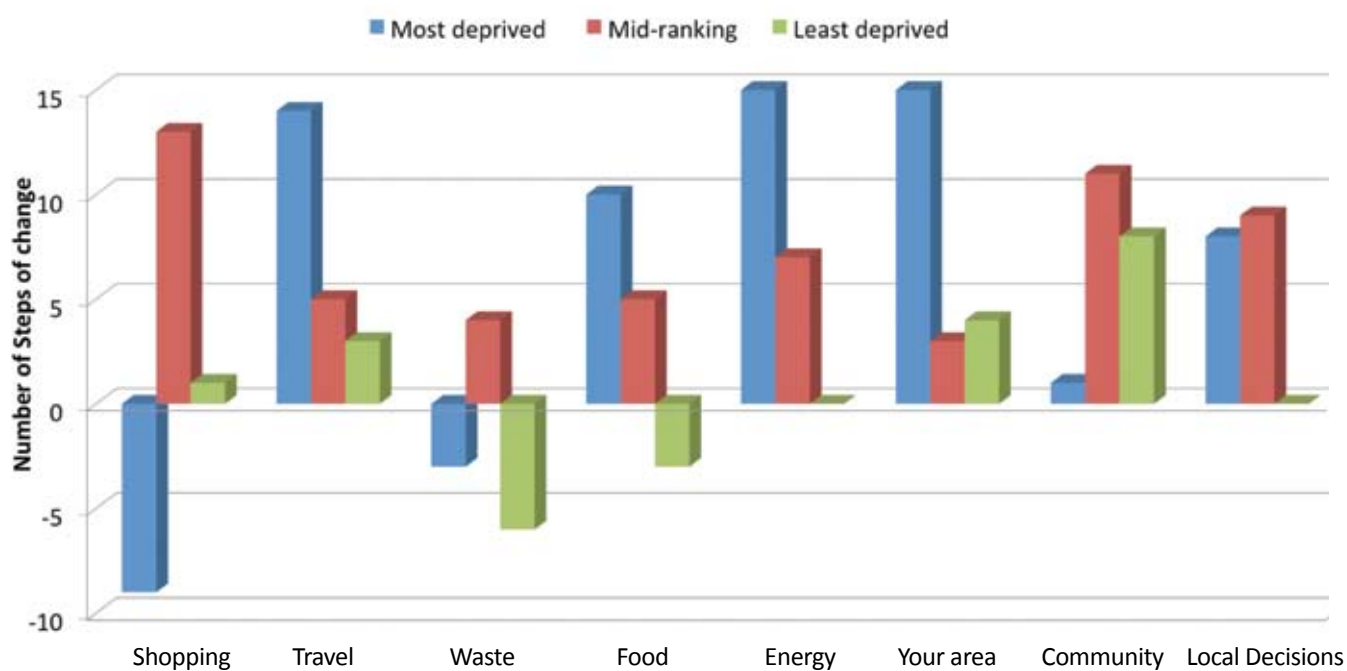


Fig. 6  
Impact of socio-economic background on pro-environmental behaviour change



The amount of change reported varied when compared with participant's socio-economic background, with volunteers coming from areas ranked as most deprived on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, showing the most change as a result of their volunteering experience. As illustrated in Fig. 6, this group was most likely to engage in new behaviours that had a direct economic impact such as transport and energy use. Those from mid ranking localities were more likely to engage in their local community and make different shopping choices. The least change was evident in those who came from the least deprived areas.

### How TCV organises volunteering appears to have a major influence

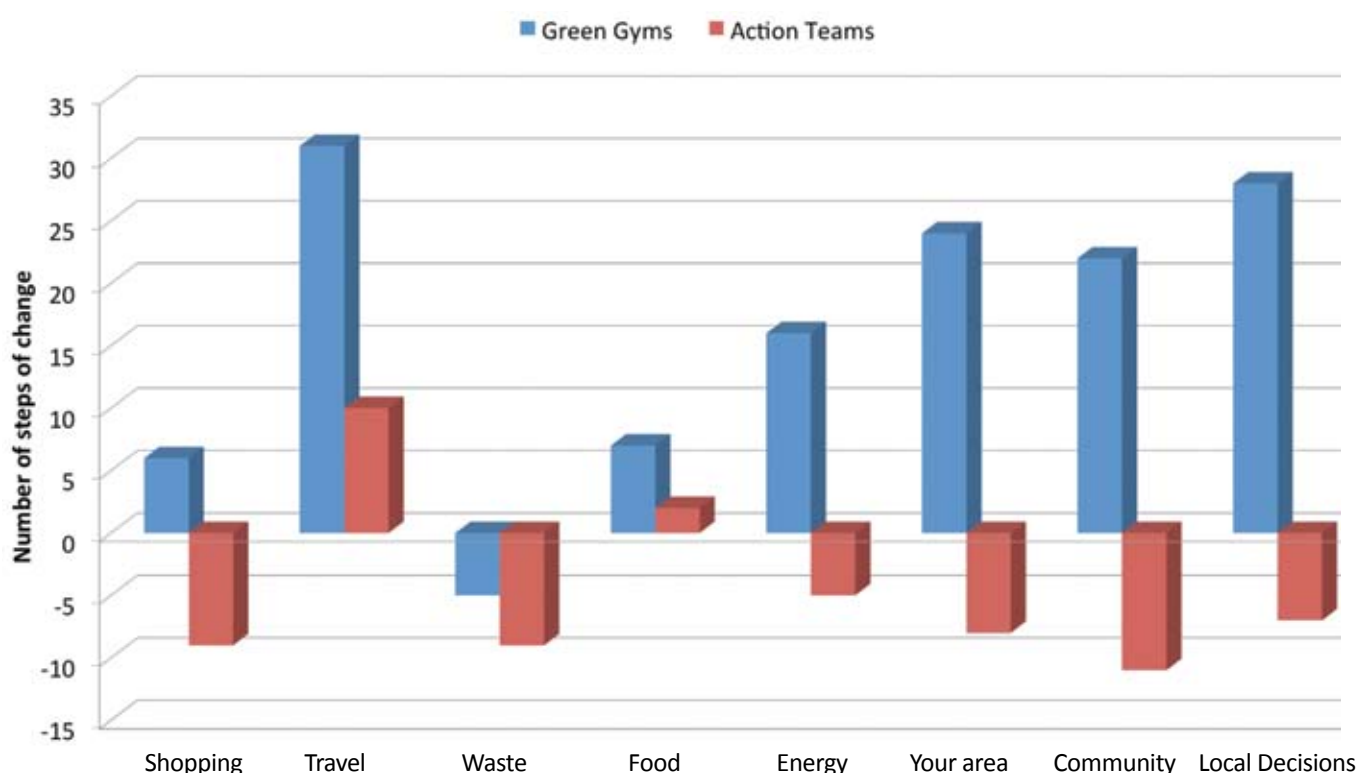
There is not one TCV model for organising volunteering but many different approaches based on the needs of the volunteers and the type of activity undertaken. The Green Impacts Project looked at two of these models:

- Action Teams: where the primary focus is undertaking work to conserve a greenspace.
- Green Gyms: where the focus is on the improving the health and wellbeing of the volunteer through being outside and involved in practical work to promote biodiversity and grow food.

Fig. 7 below shows that there is a significant difference on how the volunteers respond to the questions on environmental behaviours. This would suggest that Green Gyms are far more effective at stimulating behaviour change than Action Teams.

Many people who join a Green Gym are referred by health practitioners or have joined because of a motivation to improve their own health. The interviews have shown that many are not initially motivated by an interest in the environment. This is backed up by the baseline survey which shows that consideration of their impact on the

Fig. 7  
*Impact of different types of volunteering on pro-environmental behaviour change*



environment starts from a low base. However, ongoing involvement in the Green Gym opens people's eyes to the issues and what they can do to help address them. By the time of the third Survey many are reporting that volunteering has changed the way they think about and respond to environmental issues.

Action Teams primarily attract volunteers who are motivated by the idea of undertaking work to improve the environment. Baseline surveys show that they start from a much higher level of appreciation of environmental issues and their progress through the surveys suggest that the process of volunteering does not add much to this understanding. The negative change shown in the third survey results needs further investigation but again might be a result of volunteers being helped to see the bigger picture and re-calibrating their view of their own contribution. This is borne out by the few volunteers who have gone on to undertake fourth and fifth surveys, where the results show a high level of positive change.

“Well I’ve pretty much done all I can for the moment, I’m not prepared to give up meat, although I’ve cut down quite dramatically... maybe I could grow more of my own food but I’m not doing too badly at the moment”.

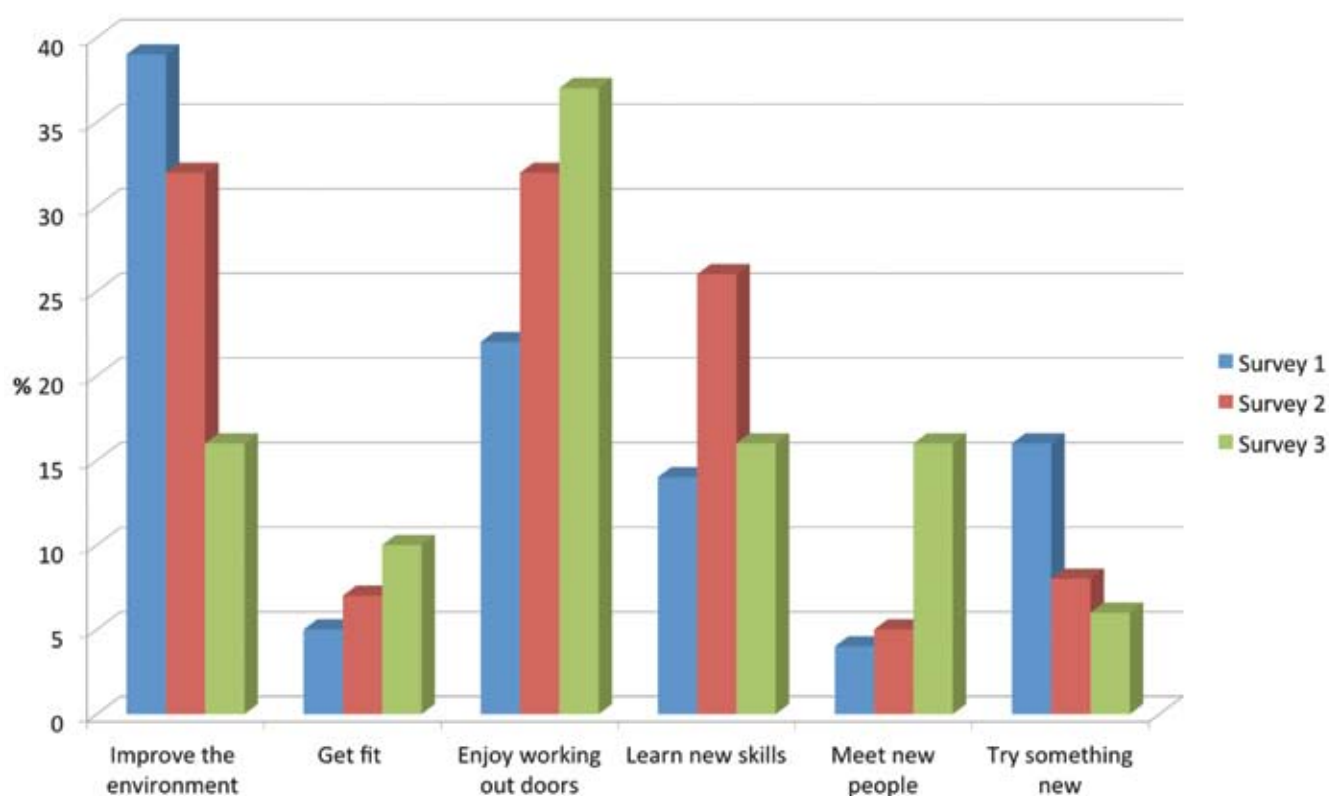
Phone interview with a TCV (Action Team) volunteer

### There is a significant shift in participant's motivation for volunteering over time

Volunteers undertaking the survey were asked to identify their motivations for volunteering. As shown by Fig. 8, volunteers' motivations change over time.

At the time of the first survey the most important motivation was 'to improve the environment'. By the time of the third survey, after volunteers had completed 10 or more sessions this had been

Fig. 8:  
*Motivations for volunteering*



replaced by 'enjoy working outdoors' as the primary motivation. The percentage of volunteers identifying their motivation as 'meet new people' also increases significantly. Clearly, an enjoyment of the outdoors and the opportunity to meet new people is something people gain from the volunteering process itself and increasingly become the motivation to continue the experience. This change accompanies an increasing move towards pro-environmental behaviours. How the two relate is worthy of further investigation. For instance, are volunteers articulating a more emotional response towards the environment through their engagement in volunteering which is having a greater impact on their attitudes and behaviour?

### **There are opportunities to support a greater impact**

The Behaviour Change Survey records changes to attitudes and behaviour and shows that volunteering can have a positive influence on people's views and actions about the environment. There are many factors that influence the extent and type of change such as age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background and the types of volunteering. Many of these are not within TCV's control but an understanding of the factors triggering pro-environmental behaviours will enable TCV to customise both the support offered to individuals and the programmes delivered for communities.

Many of the people interviewed spoke about the value of the conversations they had with TCV leaders and other volunteers. Could this be developed further into a programme of facilitated 'tea break discussions' perhaps supported by 'take away' information?

What people give to volunteering is vitally important but so is what they take away. The last word about environmental behaviour change should go to a selection of volunteers who, when asked what changes to their lifestyle they might make in the future, gave the following responses:

"Use less water at home".

"I would like to do more gardening and increase the number of plants in my garden".

"Going to be more pro-active in using my vote to help elect greener governments and councils."

"I am from Kenya where my family owns a farm. I will be going home and using my skills and my increased awareness of the environment to make more of an impact when I am working there."

"I continue doing what I did already, recycling, saving energy and water."

"Probably cycling to work more often."

"I would like to get more of my building recycling properly but I am coming at that from more of a community point of view than an environmental one."

Many of the volunteers who undertook the behaviour change survey also completed surveys related to their wellbeing at the same intervals. This provided a unique opportunity to explore the linkage between the care for oneself and the care for the environment.

# Improving Health and Wellbeing

## THE QUESTION BEING ADDRESSED

“Does involvement in volunteering help the volunteers to improve their health and wellbeing?”

TCV have been running projects to promote health and wellbeing for many years, producing a considerable amount of externally verified data to demonstrate that volunteering does deliver health and wellbeing benefits. The data presented in this section refers to a specific TCV programme: TCV's Green Gym®.

The Green Gym was established in 1997 with Dr William Bird, GP. Taking part in a Green Gym is both enjoyable and effective. It provides a unique way for people to come together, get physically active and improve their environment through practical activities such as planting trees, seeding wildflower meadows and growing food. The Green Gym has been endorsed by the Department of Health<sup>2</sup> to have proven impacts on the participants' health and wellbeing as well as on their community spaces.

## THE APPROACH TO FINDING ANSWERS

TCV use a range of methods to capture the change in health and wellbeing of Green Gym volunteers, and the wider impact of their activity through social, environmental and economic outcomes:

### SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

In 2008, the report<sup>3</sup> written by NFP Synergy, an external research consultancy, found that the Green Gym programme delivered a 1:1.5 return, with benefits such as improved health, increased leisure and increased employment.

### THE SF-12 QUESTIONNAIRE

In use since the beginning of Green Gym, the SF

health surveys are the most widely used tools in the world for measuring patient-reported outcomes, with more than 41,000,000 surveys taken and over 32,000 licenses issued to date.

An independent evaluation of Green Gym by Oxford Brookes University<sup>4</sup> analysed the SF-12 scores of Green Gym volunteers and found that health improvements were greatest amongst those with the poorest health: The 'worst off' physically were nine times more likely to improve physical health the most.

An independent evaluation<sup>5</sup> of 'Wellbeing Comes Naturally' (WCN), an England-wide programme of mental health focused projects, including Green Gyms noted improvements in mental health scores. "By analysing participant responses to the SF-12 questionnaire at four key intervals a positive picture has emerged. At questionnaire 1, just 10% of those interviewed scored over 60 (the highest banding). At questionnaire 4 (after attending 18-24 sessions), that figure had risen to 22%".

### THE 'SHORT WARWICK-EDINBURGH MENTAL WELLBEING SCALE'

This tool has been commissioned by NHS Health Scotland and developed by the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh. TCV have been using this means of measuring wellbeing in Green Exercise, a partnership with Mind and Walk Unlimited (2012-15) funded through the Department of Health Innovation Fund.

## ANSWERS AND INSIGHTS

Greens Gyms across the UK have continued to survey volunteers using the SF-12 and more recently the WEMWBS scale. Since April 2008, 6,500 SF-12 surveys have been collected (including 3,744 baseline surveys, 1,472 second surveys). TCV started to survey using WEMWBS from October 2012 since when 478 surveys have been collected (352 baseline, 126 second surveys).

2] Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: A Cross Government Strategy for England (DH, 2008) endorses Green Gyms as a strategy used by communities "to provide opportunities for [people] to increase their levels of activity in open spaces".

3] Seen et al. (2008) BTCV Impact Evaluation. NFP Synergy

4] Yerrell, P. (2008) National Evaluation of BTCV's Green Gym. Oxford Brookes University

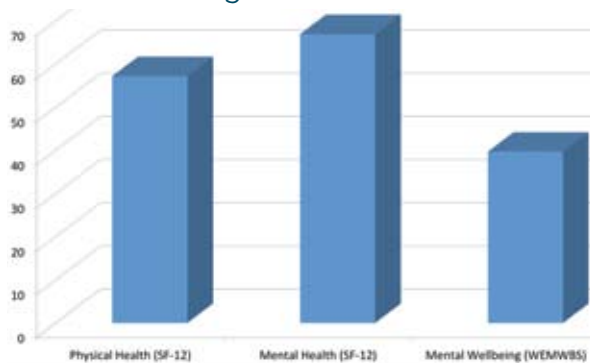
5] CAG Consultants summative evaluation of Wellbeing Comes Naturally, July 2012

## Volunteering positively impacts health and wellbeing

Volunteers are surveyed on registration with the Green Gym and after their fourth, tenth, twentieth and thirtieth sessions. The data show that a significant percentage of individuals reported improvements through these tools in wellbeing, physical and mental health as they progress through the Green Gym.

Fig.9 below shows the percentage of volunteers who reported an improvement. All volunteers attended four or more Green Gyms and completed the first and second SF-12 (1,472 volunteers) or WEMWBS (126 volunteers) surveys.

Fig. 9. Percentage of volunteers improving health and wellbeing



## Impacts are even greater for volunteers that receive training

This is the first step to analyse this recent data from Green Gyms across the UK and this chart presents some of the initial findings for volunteers who completed four or more sessions. The data also suggests that volunteers who are given training and progress into positions of responsibility report even greater improvements in physical health, mental health and wellbeing.

There is an opportunity to conduct a thorough analysis of the SF-12 data, and to look further into volunteer progression on both the physical and mental health components, through 4, 10, 20 and 30 sessions, and link to other factors such as training to identify any correlation that could support the development of Ecotherapy programmes such as the Green Gym.

## Does wellbeing correlate with pro-environmental behaviours? <sup>6</sup>

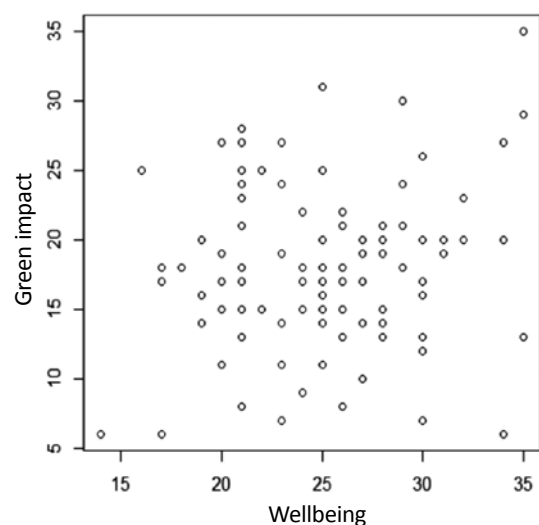
Many of those surveyed through Green Impacts on pro-environmental behaviour also completed the WEMWBS survey in parallel, providing a unique opportunity to correlate the interactions between wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviour.

The first question we looked to answer was: “Do volunteers need to reach a particular level of wellbeing before pro-environmental behaviours were evident?” As shown in Fig. 10, there is no significant correlation between wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviour change ( $r = 0.139$ ,  $p < 0.168$ )<sup>7</sup>.

As evidence shows from the above, there does not appear to be a particular level of mental wellbeing before pro-environmental behaviours are evident. Instead, pro-environmental behaviour is evident across the wellbeing spectrum and those with poor or excellent wellbeing scores were just as likely to exhibit pro-environmental behaviours.

Further analysis will be needed to show if there is a correlation between changes in an individual's wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviour as they progress through their volunteering experience, and if one precedes the other.

Fig. 10. Correlation between wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviour change



6 and 7] Contribution from Valentine Seymour, PhD Candidate, Dept. of Civil, Environmental and Geomatic Engineering (UCL)

## A CASE STUDY: The Penge Green Gym

**“Volunteering has helped me tremendously, it has been a life changing experience.”**



Penge Green Gym was first established by TCV in May 2011 in partnership with Intu Bromley, the London Borough of Bromley and with support from TCV's Wellbeing Comes Naturally (Ecominds) programme, which made it possible for the community to transform Winsford Gardens, a neglected public park in South-East London. Over 130 Green Gym volunteers have contributed over 4,900 hours to creating a vibrant community and wildlife garden by planting an urban orchard, sowing wildflower meadows, developing food growing spaces, and creating a wealth of wildlife habitats.

Penge Green Gym was developed with the primary aim to create a self-sustaining community Green Gym within two years. The group is proud to have achieved this goal, becoming independent from TCV in April 2013. The group themselves are excited about working towards their common aim, and independently taking the project onto the next stage.

**“All the Penge Green Gymers have been working really hard over the past year or two to get Winsford Gardens back into shape and try and make it an open air resource for the community. Even during the harshest months of this winter we've beavered away getting the seating area and children's adventure area established. As we become an independent community group, we're excited about planning new projects for the gardens and making it an even better place for locals to come and enjoy.”**

Brenda Little, Penge Green Gym Chair



**Erecting the greenhouse**



**First anniversary celebrations**



**Building an insect 'hotel'**



**Planting out borders**

Individuals involved in the project have also reported the huge difference to their personal lives Penge Green Gym has made, as Laura Marchant-Short, regional winner of the TCV Green Heroes 2012 awards, and fundraiser for Penge Green Gym reported:

“Volunteering has helped me tremendously, it has been a life changing experience. I was totally freaked out beforehand and all I did in the first two months was get worked up before the sessions and sleep for days after, but it has helped no end. Now I love being connected to the community and food growing. Projects such as building the greenhouse in Winsford Gardens were amazingly satisfying and I am proud showing friends my work.”



**Painting the sign**

## Quotes from Green Gym Participants



**Pond work in Camden**

“It’s a reason to leave the house and it lifts the depression. You are achieving something and you meet new people”

Charlotte, TCV volunteer

“I basically joined for the physical experience. I used to go to the gym but could not afford to continue after I lost my job. The Green Gym experience has made me physically stronger. It has also helped me become mentally stronger after being made redundant. I could have seen myself sinking into depression if not for the Green Gym. The whole process of working with the Green Gym has made the emotional experience of being long term unemployed easier.”

David, Volunteer Officer and marathon runner, now self-employed



**Improving Sheffield's landscape**

The research work on pro-environmental behaviours and wellbeing focuses on the individual volunteer and what they are getting out of the volunteering experience. However, outdoor volunteering is usually done as a group activity and that collective action potentially creates impacts above and beyond the individual action. The second component of the Green Impacts Project set out to explore aspects of these group-based impacts.



**Planting at Harmony Gardens**

“I had some mental health problems nearly three years ago. I was getting worse and worse. I felt I had to make a conscious effort of not only relying on the medicines to get me over this depression ...at the Green Gym we do various tasks such as cutting trees and everyone has a nice day. If one year and half ago I didn’t make the conscious decision of coming to a group like Green Gym, probably my conditions, my depression, my diabetes would have gone down quite a bit ...once I go from the Green Gym back home, I feel very relaxed, because I know I have done good work.”

Walter, TCV volunteer

# Community Resilience

## THE QUESTION BEING ADDRESSED

**“Which attributes of resilience enable communities to react to extreme events?”**

The extreme weather during the winter of 2013/14 has heightened policy makers’ interest in community resilience and the need to support and enable communities to promptly react in case of an emergency. The term “resilience” has traditionally been thought of in terms of a response to an emergency situation. However, increasingly, it is being linked to climate change adaptation and the need for communities to take greater responsibility for their own locality. Well functioning greenspace can be seen as a facet of a resilient place, offering as it does a range of benefits such as shade provision and water catchment. Better still, if the community is engaged in managing that greenspace, a range of transferable skills can be developed in the process.

The Green Impacts Project took as its definition of resilience one developed by the Canadian Centre for Community Renewal in the late 1990s.

**“A resilient community is one that takes intentional action to enhance the personal and collective capacity of its citizens and institutions to respond to the course of social, economic and environmental change”**

A different but insightful way of defining the character of resilience comes from Global Resiliency Network:

**“Resilience is like a muscle ...that must be developed in advance and consistently exercised to be both strong enough to withstand severe challenge and flexible enough to handle a wide range of unpredictable forces”**

## THE APPROACH TO FINDING ANSWERS

Ten local community groups were interviewed, using a standard questionnaire, to help understand how groups responded when faced with a resilience situation (extreme weather event, local emergency situation, threats to the local environment) and to identify the factors that enabled them to respond effectively. These key factors were incorporated into an assessment tool – the Resilience Framework – that could be used by local groups and those working with these groups to assess and better understand their ability to respond to a resilience situation.

The Framework was then piloted with a further 18 local groups in London providing them with valuable feedback to further validate the key factors and demonstrate the potential contribution that their group could make to the development of resilience in their communities.

## ANSWERS AND INSIGHTS

TCV groups had been involved in a wide range of ‘resilience situations’, such as:

- Keeping community facilities open after a fire
- Helping the community deal with extreme weather events; flooding, high winds and snow fall
- Creating long-term natural flood defences
- Responding to a water pollution incident
- Co-ordinating the local response to a threat to a local wildlife site
- Dealing with invasive species
- Clearing up after civil disturbance

# A CASE STUDY: Resilience interview with Boston Manor Park Local Group

## 1. Please describe the resilience situation you responded to.

*"We responded to a fire that damaged our Community Hub in Boston Manor Park".*

## 2. How did this come about (who contacted you, who knew that you could help, etc)?

*"We received a phone call in the early morning. Somebody walking in the park informed us and the fire brigade".*

## 3. In what ways were you able to help? Was this related to what you normally do as a group or different?

*"We arrived before the emergency services and worked together with the whole community and fire brigade to help put out the fire and to recover from the emergency. After the fire we set up a gazebo in the garden so that we could run the events that we had planned at the community hub, moving them outdoors instead of holding them indoors. Luckily enough the fire happened during summer".*

## 4. Was your response successful?

*"Yes, we involved all the volunteers and the cleaning up had a positive effect on the local community".*

## 5. If so, what was it about your group and the way it operates that made it successful?

*"The group has been active in the park for a number of years, we know the key people and leaders in the local community and they know us. Because we do more than just conservation work we knew how to organise events and had the skills to run them in a new and difficult situation"*

## 6. If not, what could you have done differently?

*"I cannot think of anything could be done differently. It went well and everyone worked well and with a collaborative approach".*

## 7. Has anything changed in the group/ for the group since you responded to the resilience situation?

*"The group has improved its security system. It is also more self-conscious of its importance in the area. We realised the importance of what we were doing for the community because the response from the community was so great!"*

## 8. What do you think the group has learnt from the experience?

*"The group learnt that you do not have to struggle alone in an emergency, people were there to help from all areas of the community".*



## **There are four key attributes that make a group effective in responding to new challenges**

Groups that have been involved in a resilience situation display a number of common attributes that appear to enable them to respond effectively to new challenges. These are described below:

**ACTIVITY.** This is an important part of resilience; because the more often you do something the better you get at it and the more skills that are developed. The amount and range of different activities correlated strongly with how resilient a group felt and their willingness to get involved in the wider community.

**SELF-ORGANISATION.** The ability of groups to run their own affairs and not rely on external input, which might not be there in a 'resilience situation'. A group that is effective in self-organising will be more resilient as it has the resources in place to deliver its aims and the plans in place to gain new resources, as they are needed. The groups interviewed showed the following characteristics of self-organisation:

- Clear aims, objectives and aspirations
- Decision making and capacity to operate without external assistance
- Decision making and organisation that involves the majority of the group, not just relying on a few people.
- Resources in place to run core activities at the present and in the future
- Plans in place to secure the future of the group

**CONNECTEDNESS** represents knowing who to turn to when needing help or when offering help. Important in developing resilience is knowing what is going on in the locality, understanding the role of other agencies and organisations and being open to the idea of collaboration and partnership. The involvement in local networks enabled the organisations to work at two different levels, as an individual organisation and as part of a network that enabled them to achieve different aims and play different roles.

**SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE** represents the fact that most of what you need to know and do, as a volunteer is transferable to other situations.



Leadership and organisational skills are perhaps obvious but many of the practical skills such as tool use are vital in many 'resilience situations'. Groups also reported that their members often had hidden talents, which only came out when faced with a new situation and that some way of identifying these might further improve the effectiveness of the group.

These attributes can be used to provide an understanding of the level of resilience in a particular group.

### **The four key attributes can be used as a tool to understand the level of resilience in a particular group**

An assessment process was then devised and piloted with 18 London based groups, all part of TCV's Community Network. The assessment was delivered through a workshop process where each attribute was discussed with group members and they were asked to score how they feel that they performed for each attribute. An external view was also sought from people who the group members identified as their stakeholders. The results were then feedback to the group using a chart like the one presented below in Fig.11 and the group was encouraged to think about how they might become more resilient.

## A CASE STUDY: Belsize Community Group

Belsize Community Group maintains Belsize Wood Local Nature Reserve for the benefit of people and wildlife alike; the group is run entirely by volunteers and invites the local community to take an active part in helping to manage their local green spaces. Their Resilience Assessment showed that they were very much activity driven and did not necessarily spend enough time on developing the other aspects of the group. This was borne out by the external feedback that they received through the process.

Figure 11 gives a visual representation of the Resilience Framework developed through the assessment process with the group. The scoring runs from '0' where those involved feel a particular attribute is not present to '5' where it is fully developed.

Following the resilience assessment, the group identified future plans to help make the group more resilient, which included:

### SELF-ORGANISING

- Evenly distribute the work load between members to ensure smoother running of any future projects;
- Become more actively involved in fundraising and promoting the group's profile;

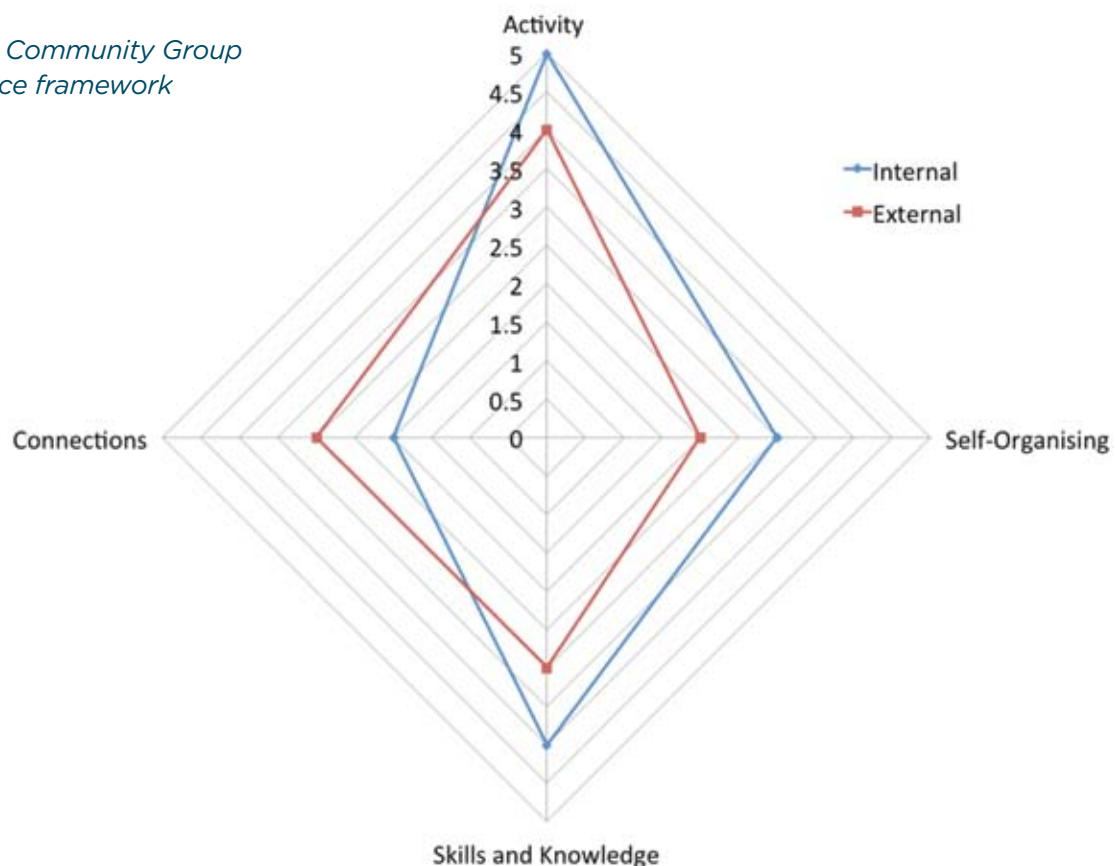
### SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

- Better share its skills and knowledge among the members of the group;
- Acquire new key skills such as fundraising and communication, essential for the sustainability of the group;

### CONNECTIONS

- Expand current contacts to support and sustain their activities.

Fig. 11  
*Belsize Community Group  
resilience framework*



The Green Impacts research suggests that there are a series of common attributes displayed by local volunteer groups that enable them to participate effectively in resilience situations. These same attributes can also be applied to assess the resilience of the group.

Application of the framework shows that groups are often operating at different levels in respect to the four attributes. Using it as a diagnostic tool provides valuable feedback to the group and also informs those organisations supporting local volunteering where an effective intervention could improve further the groups' resilience.

### **TCV could play a key role in helping community groups to improve their resilience**

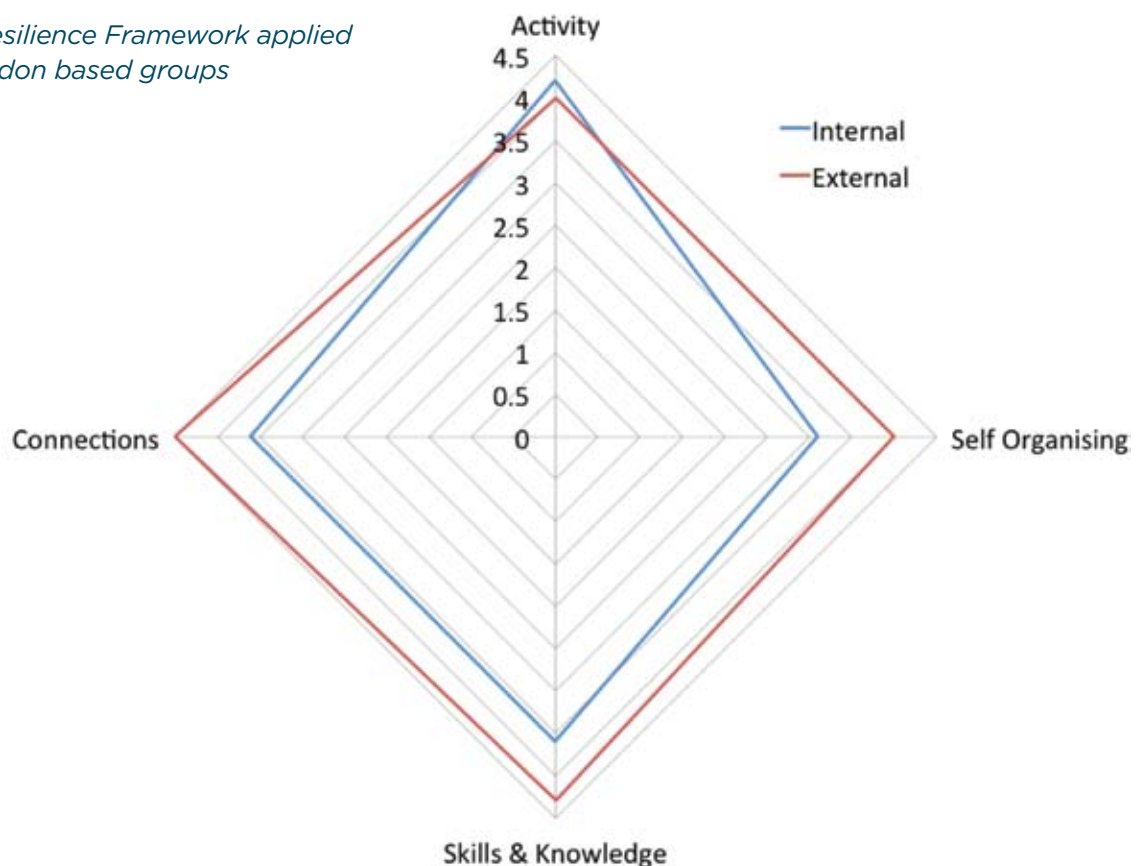
Figure 12 shows the collective results when the framework was applied to the 18 local groups in London. The average scores show that self-organisation is the attribute that the groups identified they needed most support with. It also shows that there is a significant difference in the

way that groups see themselves and the way that external stakeholders perceive them. This may suggest either that the groups are good at presenting themselves, or that they are over critical with themselves. In both cases, potential problems could arise from different expectations, the groups' expectations and the stakeholders' expectations. In an emergency situation the stakeholder, based on their perception, might ask the group to deliver something the group is not capable of, or not confident to deliver. With its Community Network, TCV could play a key role in addressing this problem, by providing training that will increase the groups' skill and confidence and help the communication between the groups and their stakeholders.

### **Volunteering has a positive impact on the resilience of the wider community**

The self-reported pro-environmental behavior change presented in (Fig.2) suggests that involvement in volunteering is having a positive impact upon people's attitudes and behaviours

*Fig. 12 Resilience Framework applied to 18 London based groups*



towards their willingness to protect the wildlife in their area and engage in their locality. In this sense, volunteering creates an “intention for action” at the individual level that has the power to increase the resilience of the wider community.

The groups reported in the workshops that volunteering as a group had enabled them to develop all four elements of the resilience framework. Additionally, groups underlined the role of TCV itself. For example, through the Community Network, TCV provided groups with connections, training, support with practical

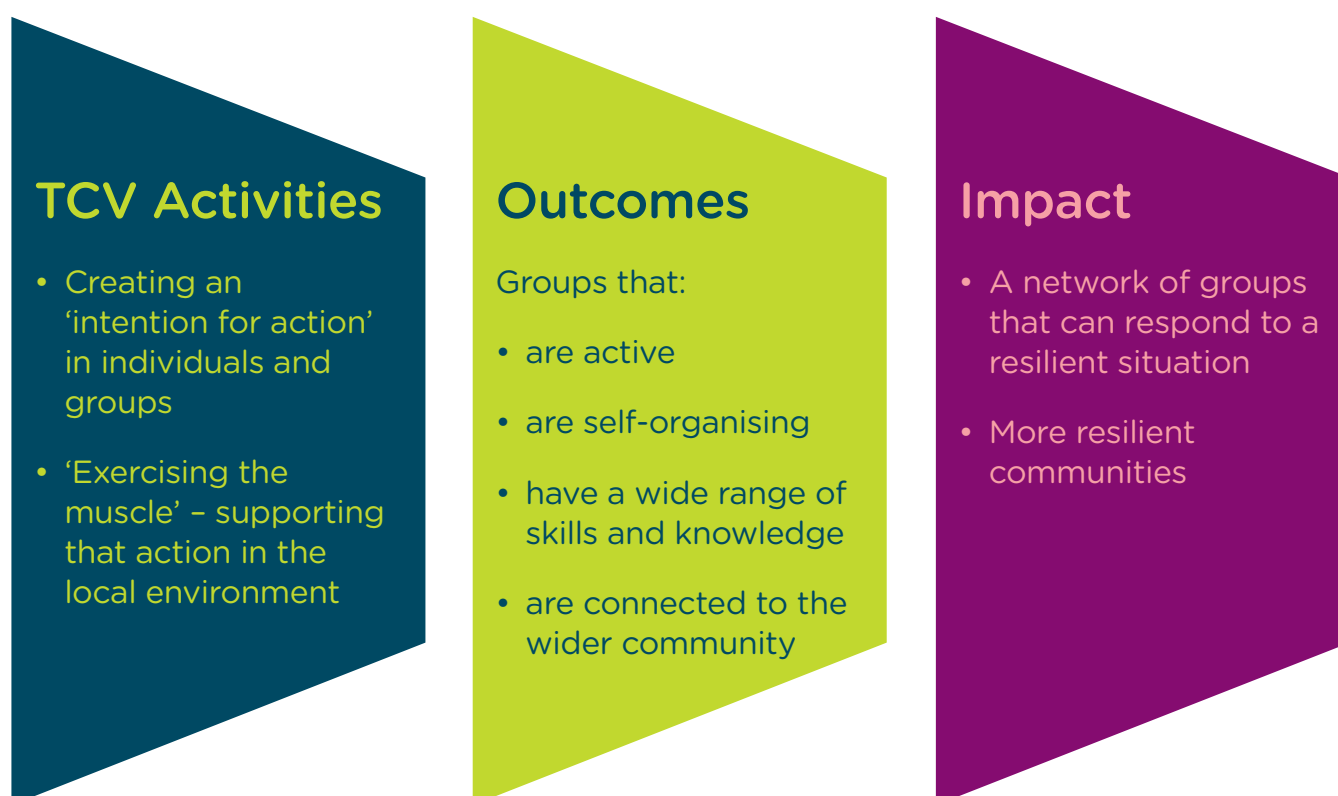
activity and funding opportunities. These factors increased their ability to have a wider impact in their community.

These findings are critical in informing how TCV support their Community Network and nurture these essential attributes when establishing and supporting new Green Gyms and Community Groups.

From the Green Impacts research TCV’s role in community resilience building could be described as in Fig.13.

Fig. 13

*The Conservation Volunteers’ role in community resilience building*



## Conclusions

TCV has long championed the wider impacts of volunteering, and as part of this process has been running the Green Impacts project for the last three years to better understand and record whether involvement in outdoor volunteering influences the development of more environmentally friendly life styles, and leads to greater community resilience. The report presents the findings from this research and links this with TCV's wider work to monitor the impacts of volunteering on individual health and wellbeing.

The results show that individuals are positively influenced by their involvement in volunteering, with a positive change across all pro-environmental behaviours apart from waste. The three questions that volunteers self-reported most change on behaviours were:

“Do you encourage wildlife in your area?”

“Do you take an active part in local decisions?”

“Do you consider the environment when selecting a form of transport?”

This research explored the many factors that influence the volunteers' ability and willingness to change, such as gender, ethnicity, age, socio-economic background, and the different types of volunteering activities. For example, positive change was more evident in women than men, in the 25-54 age range than either the younger or older age groups (see Fig. 4).

Volunteers from areas most deprived on the Index of Multiple Deprivation show the most change as a result of their volunteering experience, with the most significant change to behaviour in their engagement with their local community. These findings will help TCV to better support



volunteers and tailor programmes to suit the demographic profile and needs of local communities.

Health and wellbeing is integral to TCV's purpose and recently an increase in volunteering programmes focused on improving health is providing even further evidence to demonstrate that volunteering positively impacts health and wellbeing. Research also suggests that volunteers who are given training and progress into positions of responsibility report even greater improvements in physical health, mental health and wellbeing.

Many of those surveyed through the Green Impacts Project on pro-environmental behaviour have also completed a wellbeing survey in parallel, providing a unique opportunity to correlate the interactions between wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviour. Initial analysis suggests pro-environmental behaviours are evident across the wellbeing spectrum.

The community resilience component of the research worked with over 20 local community groups to develop an understanding of what made them resilient. The key factors that emerged were activity, self-organisation, skills and knowledge and connections. The Resilience Framework that has emerged from the Green Impacts Project not only provides TCV with a way of assessing the health of local community groups but most importantly points the way to how groups can develop to play a wider role in their communities.

These findings are critical in informing how we support our Community Network and nurture these essential attributes when establishing and supporting new Green Gyms and Community Groups.

The Green Impacts Project has shown that there is a wider environmental and social benefit to volunteering that is often underestimated. Involvement in volunteering encourages people to engage more in their local community and helps create the structures and capacity that are critical to future community resilience. This is particularly pertinent in light of the impact that the recent

extreme weather events have had on many communities.

Understanding and articulating the many impacts that emerge from the process of volunteering is of considerable importance if these are to continue to flourish. The Green Impacts Project has been able to add some important perspectives on this subject but has also pointed the way to further research such as:

- A pro-environmental behaviour study across multiple regions and encompassing a wider range of activity, perhaps using citizen science.
- The relationship between health, wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviours.
- How interventions in the volunteering process, such as training and mentoring, impact the development of health, wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviours.
- Embedding the Resilience Framework into TCV's procedures to develop community groups and Green Gyms.

## Notes

# Notes



The Conservation Volunteers  
Sedum House  
Mallard Way  
Doncaster DN4 8DB

E [information@tcv.org.uk](mailto:information@tcv.org.uk)

T 01302 388 883

[www.tcv.org.uk/volunteeringimpacts](http://www.tcv.org.uk/volunteeringimpacts)



Registered Charity in England (261009) and  
Scotland (SC039302). Registered in England  
as a limited company No. 976410



Printed on recycled paper

VOLIMP-REPORT/MK/KS/RB-0314.SEV

