

The community volunteering charity



TCV

The
Conservation
Volunteers

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Introduction

The challenges facing communities in the UK today are significant and many – social, health and economic inequality, a lack of community cohesion in many areas and an increase in isolation and loneliness to name just a few. At the same time, funding for the care of green spaces, so essential to any healthy, happy community, continues to diminish.

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These are challenging, changing and uncertain times and there has never been more need for the work of TCV, which is refreshingly simple in its approach; we connect people and green spaces to deliver lasting outcomes for both.

In this booklet you'll find out more about who we are – our vision, our mission and some of the outputs from our work – and we'll look at the multiple outcomes that we deliver for people and green spaces, with examples from around the UK.

You can find out much more about TCV at www.tcv.org.uk, including our strategy for 2018-21: *Connecting People and Green Spaces*.

We're inspired by and grateful to all those who already support our vital work, be they volunteers, members of staff, funders or other partners. If you are inspired after reading about what we are achieving together, we would love you to join us too.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tony Crook'.

Prof Tony Crook CBE
Chair



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Darren York'.

Darren York
Chief Executive



Who we are



**We are TCV,
the community
volunteering charity**

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Our VISION:
**Healthier, Happier
Communities for
Everyone.**



Our MISSION:

**To Connect People
and Green Spaces
to Deliver Lasting
Outcomes for Both.**

We do this by bringing people together to create, improve and care for green spaces. From local parks and community gardens to Local Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest; from school grounds and hospital grounds to waterways, wetlands and woodlands; we connect people to the green spaces that form a vital part of any healthy, happy community.

Our team of dedicated, passionate staff and volunteers work with communities across England, Northern Ireland and Scotland and, through our Community Network, we support local community groups across the UK.



Who we are

Each year we work with



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Transforming
1,500
green spaces in
UK communities

Delivering
140,000
volunteer days

14,000
projects



1,600 people
with a
disability

17,000 school
children

16% are from
a BAME
community

30% of the
community
groups are in
the top 20%
most deprived
UK areas



100,000 people

11,000 registered
volunteers
commit
their time on a
regular basis

4,500
employees
from partner
organisations
volunteer
their time for
our cause

100+ partner
organisations
work with TCV
across the UK



Improving
18 ha
of woodland
5,000 m
of waterways
35 km
of paths
Planting
190,000
trees



“ The Conservation Volunteers are the unsung heroes of the environment.

No one will protect what they do not first care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced...

Simply as a citizen, I want to thank you for the way you have transformed the way in which I spend my urban life ... You provide not only reasons but the ability to do things. You are an astonishing organisation. ”

TCV Vice President, Sir David Attenborough CBE

Communities

Environment

**Our
OUTCOMES**
and how we deliver
them

**Learning
& Skills**

**Health &
Wellbeing**



Communities

Communities are stronger, working together to improve the places where people live and tackle the issues that matter to them.

We bring residents and other stakeholders together and provide them with the practical expertise, resources and training they need to engage in sustained social action that makes a positive difference.

We draw upon our expertise as a national organisation and take a local approach, working with people and communities to co-design solutions that meet local needs.

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Through the TCV Community Network we connect groups with each other and provide access to a package of support including a dedicated website, competitively-priced insurance, discounts on training and merchandise, funding information, access to grants and much more.


Nick really enjoyed the “Walk on Wheels” event his group organised



EXAMPLE PROJECT: GROWING COMMUNITIES

TCV's Growing Communities is an exciting environmental scheme working with communities in West Sussex. This ground-breaking initiative encourages local residents to get involved with projects such as Green Gym, sports activities or food growing programmes to improve their own wellbeing and also enhance the local environment.

The project, funded by the Big Lottery Fund and Adur and Worthing Councils, enables the TCV team to work closely with the local community to understand their needs. We support residents to suggest the schemes they want and see them brought to life.

A photograph of two children riding scooters on a paved path. The child in the foreground is a girl with blonde hair wearing a light blue jacket and dark blue trousers. The child behind her is a boy wearing a grey patterned jacket and dark trousers. They are both smiling and looking forward. The background shows a clear blue sky with some clouds and a fence. A semi-transparent dark blue box with white text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

“ The project continues to go from strength to strength with regular events attracting people of all ages and abilities from the local community. For those who volunteer, it also gives them something to look forward to and a sense of achievement. It is great to see so many people joining in, having fun and improving their health and wellbeing by being outdoors, active and connected with others. **”**

Nick, a project volunteer



Environment

Green spaces are created, protected and improved, for nature and for people.

We deliver practical volunteering programmes, providing people with the transport, tools, equipment and project leadership they need to play an active role in creating, protecting and improving green spaces.

We work on a wide range of wildlife habitats including woodlands, hedgerows, grassland, waterways and wetlands.

We plant trees, from single specimens to new woodlands and hedgerows, providing homes for wildlife and improving climate and air quality.

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From boardwalks and dipping platforms to fences and footpaths, we provide access improvements and on-site interpretation that balances the needs of nature and people.



EXAMPLE PROJECT: IMPROVING NATURAL HABITATS

TCV Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage have been working in partnership for over 10 years – improving important habitats and green spaces.

TCV's work has concentrated on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), removing non-native invasive plants and trees and we are proud that our work has helped return over 80% of the area's natural features to a favourable or recovering condition.

For example, TCV has been working on the River Fleet which supports internationally important numbers of waders and wildfowl. TCV volunteers have been busy stopping the spread of non-native invasive species from encroaching on this unique habitat.

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We have also been working on a site at Balmaha, close to Loch Lomond, removing non-native invasive plants. Continued monitoring of the site has shown that our work has removed 94% of all Himalayan Balsam and dramatically improved the biodiversity of this important feeding ground for Ospreys and habitat for rare butterflies.

Volunteers maintain delicate habitats, removing invasive species to give room for native plants to thrive and increasing species diversity.



Health & Wellbeing

People improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing, by being outdoors, active and connected with others.

A wide range of TCV activities provide opportunities to improve physical and mental health and wellbeing through physical activity and social interaction.

Through our Green Gym programme, we provide an alternative to traditional gym or fitness activities. Almost one third more calories can be burnt in some Green Gym sessions than in an average aerobics class.

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Green Gym consists of fun and free outdoor sessions that improve green spaces. The emphasis is very much on health and fitness, improving the physical and mental health and wellbeing of those involved.

*Mark thinning silver birch
in the woodlands at
Coves Reservoir*



EXAMPLE PROJECT: MARK AND COVES RESERVOIR GREEN GYM

Mark started as a volunteer with TCV after visiting his doctor regarding mental health concerns. He was referred for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and signposted towards TCV's Green Gym sessions.

“Becoming a volunteer has brought me many benefits, both mental and physical. Having something specific to do every week has brought a bit of structure to my life, interacting with other volunteers along with the sense of being part of the community has gone a long way towards lifting the feelings of isolation and loneliness I was experiencing. I find the physical work and just being outside in nature has lifted my mood, boosted my confidence, and generally made me feel less unfit.

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I'd never really done any sort of outdoor work before volunteering with TCV, but now I'm able to work with tools properly and confidently... I've learned to appreciate the outdoors more and increased my observational skills, being able to identify many trees, plants, animals etc.

For me, the social and community aspects of volunteering have been the most notable. Years of isolation had severely blunted my ability to interact with people socially, but Green Gym has provided a safe environment for me to relearn the skills I'd lost.”

Learning & Skills

People improve their confidence, skills and prospects, through learning inspired by the outdoors.

We deliver a wide range of learning and skills through programmes of non-accredited and accredited training courses. These include practical skills training, project leadership, health and safety, volunteer recruitment and evaluation, community engagement, species ID and first aid. We train volunteers, community groups and other organisations.

Through our Community Network we support community groups with access to free conservation miniguides and practical safety resources, along with discounted conservation handbooks and training.

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We run a range of programmes that offer people a chance to learn more about their natural environment and take part in scientific research and surveying.

Louise gained confidence in leading sessions with adults and children



EXAMPLE PROJECT: LOUISE AND SKELTON GRANGE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE IN LEEDS

Louise gained practical skills and experience and confidence through her volunteering with TCV. This has led to her developing new interests in working with young people in the outdoors and has enabled her to secure full-time employment as a Ranger with Leeds City Council.

“ After I graduated from University I found myself unable to get a job in any of the areas I wanted to work in. When I did get feedback, it was usually that I needed more experience.

I'd done a lot of volunteering at University and I knew that it was a great way to meet people and gain skills so as soon as I moved to Leeds I searched for 'Conservation Volunteering Leeds' and TCV came up.

I've learnt a huge array of practical skills like carpentry, food growing and how to cut down trees, but as well as that I've learnt a lot about working with people, especially children. Working outside so much and being encouraged to cycle in means that I'm physically fitter than I have been for years.

I now work as a Ranger with Leeds City Council. I get to plan my own activities and get paid for it, but when I can, I still come back and volunteer on my days off - they can't get rid of me that easily! ”



Why we are needed

The **UK** is among the most **nature-depleted** countries in the world, having lost significantly more over the long term than the **global average**.¹

Green space and infrastructure aid cognitive development and result in **better education outcomes for children**.²

1.3 million children in the UK don't visit the natural environment even once per year.³

People who **volunteer** have better mental and physical health than those who do not volunteer.⁴

Over 9 million people in the UK report they are always or often lonely.⁵

The extent of people's **participation** in their communities and the **added control** over their lives that this brings has the potential to contribute to their **psychosocial wellbeing**, and as a result, to other health outcomes.⁶

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1 State of Nature 2016, RSPB

2 Keeping us well: How non-health charities address the social determinants of health. NPC

3 Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment: a pilot to develop an indicator of visits to the natural environment by children - results from years 1&2 (March 2013 to February 2015). Hunt, A., Stewart, D., Burt, J. & Dillon, J., Natural England Commissioned Reports, number 208

4 Providing social support may be more beneficial than receiving it: Results from a prospective study of mortality. Brown, Neese, Vinokur and Smith, Psychological Science, 14 (4): 320-327

5 The British Red Cross

6 Fair Society, Healthy Lives, Marmott review, Feb 2010

My time working as a warden at TCV was as enjoyable as it was invaluable for my career development. I joined the project having struggled to find work in the conservation sector and left having gained a number of qualifications, as well as essential experience in planning practical projects and running volunteer tasks.

*Christopher Lickley,
Solent Way Warden*

TCV offered a variety of outdoor project work that enabled our young people to get off the ward and into the fresh air. One young man receiving treatment for cancer, who also had an autism spectrum disorder, joined in and continued to volunteer after his treatment finished.

*Richard Hitchins,
Teenage Cancer Trust*

Green Gym helped me to regain the confidence to return to employment and I now have a full-time job.

*Green Gym volunteer,
Portslade Green Gym,
East Sussex*

It gave my daughter so much confidence being out messy in nature rather than being nervous about it.

*Father of an Under 5s Nature
Explorer participant*

I've always had an interest in plants, animals and the outdoors, so volunteering with TCV was one of the best decisions that I've ever made. I've gone from feeling totally depressed, to spending all my time on conservation volunteering and doing what I enjoy.

*Keith, TCV Volunteer
Officer*



Working in partnership

We believe that we can achieve more by working in partnership with others than we can on our own.

As a charity we rely on the support of organisations that share our determination to address the challenges facing people and green spaces today.

We are proud to be supported by local and national government, lotteries, private organisations, charities, trusts and landowners – all of whom are committed to our vision of healthier, happier communities for everyone.

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“Working in partnership with TCV over the last 10 years has really helped us to continue making a difference in our local communities. Our employees always look forward to volunteering with TCV who are experts in the field of conservation volunteering.”

Ross McEwan,
CEO, RBS

You can find out more about those we work in partnership with at **www.tcv.org.uk**



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 TCV – The Conservation Volunteers

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