



Outcome: Community support

Volunteer case study: David - TCV Leicester


“My son is the constant and most important thing in my life. He is what gives my life meaning and Green Gym is what gives my life joy.”

Through the work of The Conservation Volunteers, communities become stronger, working together to improve the places where people live and tackle the issues that matter to them.

Using a resident-focused approach, TCV Leicester's Green Gym was set up to improve social connectedness, address loneliness and develop opportunities for the community.

After losing his partner and becoming a single dad with a young son to care for, David's life became increasingly isolated and lonely. Finding his community at Green Gym helped him on the right track to transform his life.

It wasn't until he saw a poster for Green Gym at his son's school that invited him to meet new people in the community whilst exercising and gardening that he decided to make a change.



“I was just getting up, taking my son to school, coming home and doing nothing. I was lonely and miserable, but I could not and did not want to do anything about it”

David had always wanted to try gardening but didn't feel sure enough in himself to do it on his own. He thought he might enjoy it more with other people in a group.



According to a 2019 report from [The National Lottery Community Fund](#), finding meaning is at the heart of tackling loneliness. Their learning suggests that helping to change a lonely person's mindset is the essential ingredient to tackling the social isolation problem within the UK.

Feeling anxious about not knowing anybody, David attended his first Green Gym session and met TCV Project Officer Julie and Green Gym volunteer Zoe.

"When I first went, I didn't feel comfortable being the centre of attention, so I would just stick to the side. I would get on with my work and listen to everyone around me but not actually contribute to the conversation."

"Now, we bounce off each other, we banter with each other and there isn't a topic we cannot discuss. Before I didn't feel like I could talk to anybody but Julie has made me feel so welcome."

The impact that attending the Green Gym and engaging with his local community not only had a positive effect on David, but on his son too.

"I went on my own on Thursdays and took my son with me on a Saturday. This really made a difference because Thursdays I could really get into the group and on Saturday, it got us out of the house."

It just became part of our routine and we really enjoy it."



David said that getting out of the house for a few hours and volunteering has helped him to manage his depression and anxiety.

"I could easily drop my son off at school and go home, but I don't. I make an active decision to go to Green Gym, even when I'm feeling down. I can talk to everyone about why I am feeling it."

Green Gym has a variety of evidence to highlight the impact on mental health, including research by University of Westminster showing group members having higher levels of well-being and lower levels of stress.

Recently we completed a four-year long review of the impact of Green Gym with University of Westminster and Essex University, which showed an increase in mental health scores as a result of participation with sustained benefits for over a year.

By building his own community at Green Gym, David has found something that he not only enjoys, but adds value to his life.



"The Green Gym is not just about gardening; it can make a difference to a community. It can open doors which you thought were shut or too far to reach."

"You can make a difference not just as an individual but also to the wider community. The Green Gym is like a family - a green hub for the community."

Julie Richards, Project Officer at TCV Leicester

Find more ways how TCV supports volunteers in their local community and how you can help by visiting our website.

www.tcv.org.uk

