

Telford Green Gym:

Providing opportunities for health improvement for people with mental health problems and learning difficulties, or otherwise socially excluded.

Improving green spaces for the benefit of local communities.

Aims

Telford Green Gym offers an alternative way for local people to improve their health and well-being by getting involved in practical horticulture, conservation and environmental activities.

The Green Gym's aim is to improve the physical and emotional health of adults with a diagnosed mental illness, learning disability and/or those experiencing social exclusion, through the provision of a range of practical conservation volunteering activities such as:

- footpath improvements and habitat management,
- community gardening and allotments,
- biological monitoring and
- healthy walks.

Actions

Telford Green Gym targets some of the most vulnerable and deprived groups in the area, in relation to social exclusion, low income and health inequalities.

Target groups are:

- adults with a diagnosed mental illness,
- learning disability
- and/or those experiencing social exclusion
- people with chronic and/or enduring physical health conditions

The environmental need is also large, as it is in any county maintaining nature reserves, country parks, parks, urban spaces and the wider countryside. Urban and rural wild spaces are under increasing pressure from population growth and new buildings, just when they are increasingly identified as being important to people's health and wellbeing. 'Biophilia' is the phenomenon identified which describes the positive impact of wildlife and the environment on well-being.

Achievements

- 125 different people have taken part in the 412 Green Gym sessions since August 2006, adding up to a total of 1300 voluntary hours contributed to improving local communities.
- We now have an average of 9.72 participants at each session.
- We recently conducted a survey of people attending the Green Gym; this is what they told us. Of 28 surveyed:
 - 21 said they'd been feeling positive about the future, 20 felt more confident and 22 had been feeling cheerful.
 - 27 had made new friends through the Green Gym and felt part of the group.
 - 25 felt useful and 19 had got involved in other activities or hobbies as well as coming to the Green Gym.
 - Many also reported improvements in physical health including weight loss, eating more healthily, cutting down on smoking and alcohol.

Background

Green Gyms run across the country, and research carried out by Oxford Brookes University has shown that they can help people to improve their mental well-being as well as their physical fitness.

Telford Green Gym is part of the Primary Care Trust's Health Improvement Team and is now fully funded and managed by the PCT. It was originally set up in partnership with BTCV and we retain strong links with this voluntary agency, who manage the licence agreement.

Lessons learnt

- The Green Gym has succeeded by tailoring its service to the needs of the individuals referred.
- Access is a key issue, and the provision of a minibus pick up service means that more vulnerable people are able to come along.
- We need to make sure we publicise the service and keep reminding referrers that we are here!
- In the future, we need to ensure we are reaching our key target groups, developing the participant pathway and increasing opportunities for moving on to new achievements in other areas.

A few comments

From participants:

- Cliff supports me and encourages me with the work that I do and I feel very happy working with nature, and seeing the wild animals and trees.
- I am that busy now, in other things, I don't have much time to come to the Green Gym. I will come now and again when I can fit it in.
- I have poor mobility which got better since coming on the green gym. My mental and physical well-being has improved. I'm happy doing the green gym.

From referrers:

- Green Gym is a very valued service/project by both clients and staff. It has without doubt contributed to positive outcomes from the unit.
- For all the individuals I have referred and have accessed the Green Gym all feedback has been positive. For the majority it has had a positive influence on their mental health and physical health needs. All have enjoyed the social aspects of accessing the group. An invaluable service.
- It offers a positive opportunity to clients to develop skills etc...therefore enabling our time to be used in other activities/aspects of care.

Partners

Referral agencies include Mental Health Services, Substance Misuse Teams, NACRO, Employment Link, Creative Support, Job Centre Plus, Housing Trust, Learning Disability Services, Volunteer Bureau, Connexions, Health Promotion Services, voluntary organisations and carers' services.

Site providers - Severn Gorge Countryside Trust, The Greenwood Trust, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Telford & Wrekin Council environmental services, STROWP, local allotment & parks associations.

Contact

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