

Public health case study

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Pro-Active Minds Green Gym launch

The project

The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) in partnership with Mind, have received funding from the Department of Health's Health and Social Care Volunteering Fund to deliver a practice development project. The aim of the initiative is to promote individual resilience and wellbeing for people who are at risk of developing a mental health condition or who have otherwise presented with emotional distress.

The project, Pro-Active Minds, has been co-designed with NHS and Public Health Commissioners and will contribute to the achievement of local Health and Wellbeing strategies in the delivery areas, providing an effective prevention and early intervention programme. It aims to enhance local capacity; with the potential to reduce costs for healthcare services, and provide a mechanism to establish greater community cohesion.

The project utilises an innovative and sustainable volunteer-led, peer support model within an ecotherapy setting based on a framework of "Five Ways to Wellbeing" (Aked *et al.*, 2009).

Pro-Active Minds launched in February 2016 in the London Boroughs of Enfield, Hackney, Hounslow and Newham, a partnership with TCV, Mind, Local Minds, Public Health and Adult Social Care Services.

TCV

Every day TCV works across the UK to create healthier and happier communities for everyone. Delivering over 900,000 volunteering hours a year to support communities, TCV's activities have a lasting impact on people's health, prospects and outdoor places.

Mind

Mind, the mental health charity, provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. Mind campaign to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding.

Pro-Active Minds: building on evidenced-based Green Gym® model

Pro-Active Minds builds on TCV's evidence-based Green Gym® model (TSIP, RSPH), which supports groups to be physically active and socially engaged by transforming neglected green spaces through practical activities (Plate 1).

Green Gym is a "health by stealth" programme. It is marketed to volunteers and prioritises individual outcomes (i.e. health, wellbeing and resilience) with an additional focus on potentially wider social benefits and collective group outcomes (i.e. environmental, access to nature and sense of community). This positioning of the Green Gym uniquely enables TCV to engage and support both those referred and people who are not already accessing local services, at risk and often isolated.

The Green Gym model used by Pro-Active Minds supports the "Five Ways to Wellbeing"

"Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give" are a set of evidence-based actions which promote wellbeing and that can be undertaken by individuals in their daily lives. This gives the model lasting impact (Figure 1).

Plate 1 Green Gym participants at work



Figure 1 Five ways to wellbeing (NEF)



Additional benefits – Pro-Active Minds is also addressing the growing need to

- Engage communities in green spaces to improve the local environment, biodiversity and access to nature with associated health and wellbeing gains. The State of UK Public Parks 2016 report, published by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) highlights the growing public utilisation of parks, set against declining budgets, staff, skills and the quality of parks:

As Chair of ukactive I know the importance of keeping our communities physically active, and see programmes such as ParkLives and Green Gyms driving park use and supporting investment (Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson – HLF State of UK Public Parks, 2016)

- Provide intergenerational opportunities to get physically active and build social connections.

Sport England's Active People Survey reported that "over 70% of us don't do enough physical activity to benefit our health" and "sports and exercise declined markedly with age". Conversely, Green Gym volunteers become increasingly active with age with both the number and percentage of volunteers aged over 55 is growing. In fact, 40 per cent of all Green Gym volunteers are over 50 and this group complete more than 50 per cent of the total volunteering effort. Recruitment for Pro-Active Minds is ongoing and we expect it to mirror the demographics of existing Green Gym volunteers.

Project outputs

- 672 participants, 216 volunteer roles (people taking additional responsibility post programme);
- Green Spaces actively managed by the community; and
- Bespoke training developed and delivered by Mind and TCV.

Outcomes

Outcomes including wellbeing, social capital, coping skills and physical health will be monitored as part of the evaluation using robust and validated scales including The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale. Participants will complete questionnaires at weeks 1, 7 and 13 of the programme, plus a three month follow-up questionnaire to look at the impact of the programme on these outcomes over time. In depth interviews with stakeholders, participants and staff will investigate how the programme is perceived by referral partners and commissioners, whether the programme has had an impact on volunteer outcomes, and how the delivery of the intervention could be improved in the future.

Reference

Aked, J.O.D.Y., Marks, N., Cordon, C. and Thompson, S. (2009), "Five ways to wellbeing: a report presented to the foresight project on communicating the evidence base for improving people's well-being", NEF, London.

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