



BTCV Green Gym[®] National Evaluation Report: *Summary of Findings*

Context

The National Evaluation of Green Gym Projects was undertaken between July 2003 and August 2007 by Dr. Paul Yerrell at the School of Health and Social Care, Oxford Brookes University.

The Evaluation was conducted using an Introductory Questionnaire and a Continuation Questionnaire, which were distributed by Project Leaders during Green Gym sessions.

The questionnaires included:

- SF12: version 2, a standardised health status survey.
- Modified questionnaires previously developed by BTCV on 'motivations for joining' and 'benefits of Green Gym to the community'
- Demographic questions of participants, including their previous volunteering and conservation activities.
- A self-report physical activities inventory, which was 'translated' into Metabolic Equivalent Tasks (METs); a measure of energy expenditure.

'Benefits of Green Gym to the community' only appeared in the Continuation questionnaire.

The Continuation Questionnaire was to be completed after a minimum of 3 months; 67% were completed between 3 to 8 months, for the remaining third a longer gap was recorded.

703 participants, from 52 Green Gym Projects completed the introductory questionnaire. Of this number, 194 participants completed both the introductory and continuation questionnaires.

The Green Gym Projects

The 52 projects were located in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. They varied in nature, principally,

in relation to socio-economic locality and 'recruitment' patterns, which included, for example, both volunteering and voluntary involvement following recommendations from health and social care professionals and organisations.

In July 2003, some projects were already up-and-running and could be considered established Green Gyms. Other projects commenced during the period of data collection; others closed following the completion of their development phase.

The Green Gym Participants

The profile of participants shows the diversity of project members and how the Green Gym is inclusive in its 'recruitment' in relation to age, gender, marital status, education, housing and employment status. The one exception is minority ethnic groups; 97% of respondents were 'white'. (NB. Since 2005, BTCV's Green Gym attendance records have registered 89.5% of participants as 'white', which may suggest that many members from BME are not participating in the evaluation. Further exploration is needed).

To illustrate this diversity the following profiles have been highlighted:

- Approximately 80% of participants fall equally within 4 age bands (25-34; 35-44; 45-54; 55-64)
- Males represent around 60% of GG participants. Males also represent about two-thirds of the 66% of GG participants who 'live alone'.
- 46% of participants (N = 219) responding to a question on employment were unemployed, and 12% were retired.
- 82% of GG participants with no formal qualifications were unemployed.
- 28% had no formal qualification and 31% had degrees.

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Figure 1: Age range (years) of participants on completion of Introductory questionnaire

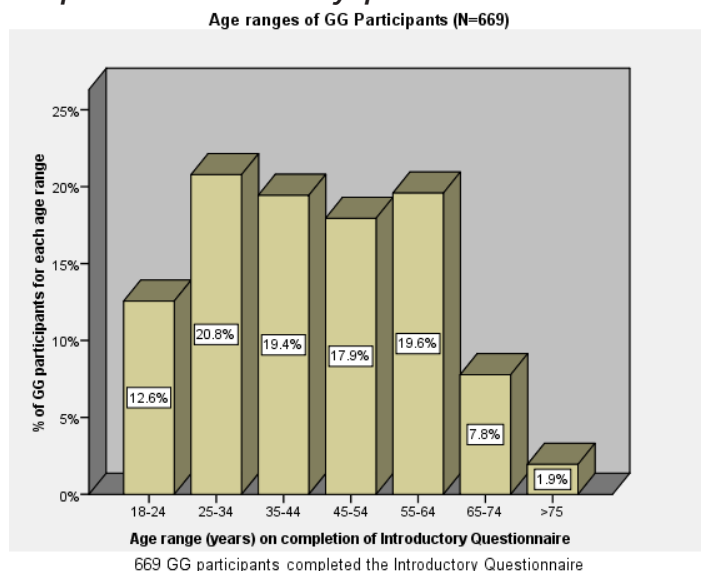


Figure 2: Level of Educational Attainment of participants

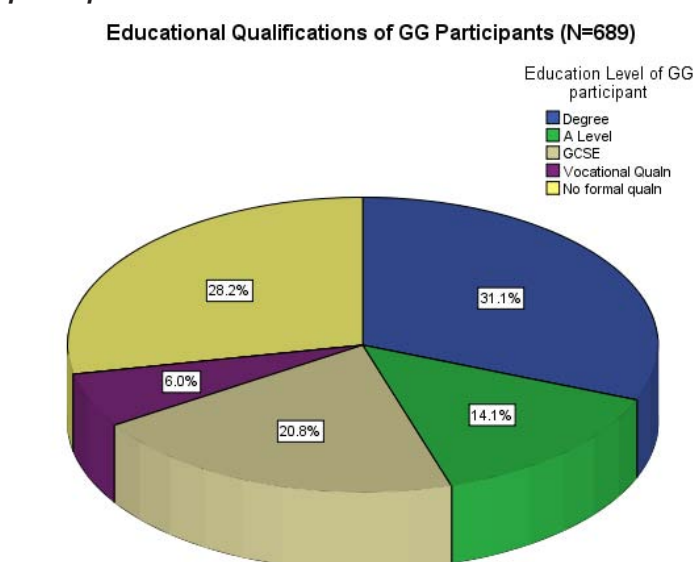
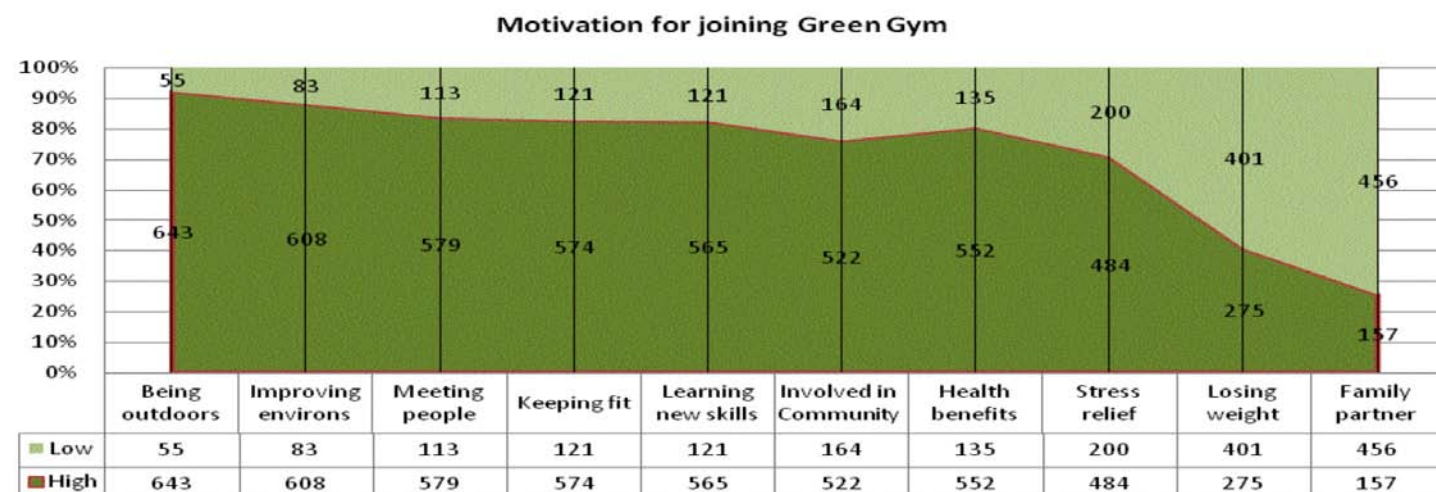


Figure 3: Motivation for joining Green Gym



Participants (N = 564) heard about the Green Gym by:

- Word of mouth
- Communication through organisations or media
- From health and social care professionals and providers.

'Referrals' from health and social care form a distinct sub-group of participants, with, generally, lower scores for health measures on the introductory questionnaire.

Over 60% of participants were new to volunteering and only 32% had been involved in conservation activities before joining. Of those referred by a health professional, over 72% were new to volunteering and to environmental volunteering.

The two factors most highly rated as 'motivation for joining Green Gym' are 'Being outdoors' and 'Improving the environment'; the lowest rated factors being 'Losing weight' and 'Being with family or partner'.

The daily activities of 13% of those who completed the Introductory Questionnaire were likely to be compromised by their physical health (as measured by the SF12 health survey).

The daily activities of 23% of those who completed the Introductory Questionnaire were likely to be compromised by their mental health (as measured by the SF12), which is a higher proportion than found in the general population

The Benefits

SF12 scores for both physical and mental well-being on the Introductory Questionnaire significantly predict the difference between scores on Introductory Questionnaire and on the Continuation Questionnaire. Examination of this pattern of scores strongly suggests that participants scoring low on SF12 on the Introductory Questionnaire are those who are 'improving' the most:

- On average, the physical health status of Green Gym participants, as measured by the SF12, improved significantly, with, for some participants, a positive change after 3 months.
- Those with the lowest physical health scores on the introductory questionnaire were 9 times more likely to be the ones improving their physical health the most.
- Similarly, those with the lowest mental health scores on the introductory questionnaire were 3 times more likely to be the ones improving the most.

This also applies to participants' physical activity levels measured in METs. Participants who were the least active upon joining were 3 times more likely to increase their level of physical activity.

On the 'Benefits of Green Gym in the Community':

- 99% of participants 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statements on 'health and confidence' including 'I feel

more positive about myself as a result of my involvement with the group' and 'I have made new friends as a result of working with the group'.

- 94% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statements on 'skills and training' which included 'I have learnt new skills through my involvement in the group' and 'Through involvement in the group I am more aware of the learning opportunities open to me'.
- 92% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statements on 'contribution to the environment' which included 'The work of the group contributes to Biodiversity and Habitat and Species Action Plans' and 'The broader community appreciates the work our Green Gym group does'.

Such agreement reflects both a sense of personal achievement and positive self-worth, alongside an appreciation of the political, managerial and biodiversity aspects of conservation work in the local environment. Motivations for joining are fulfilled by being a member of a Green Gym project.