Using bespoke evaluation tools & creating your own measures

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Brighton & Hove Food Partnership is a hub for information, inspiration and connection around food.

A non-profit organisation that helps people learn to cook, to eat a healthy diet, to grow their own food and to waste less food.

• Work with individuals
• Work with groups
• Work at a strategy and policy level

These are interconnected.
Sharing the Harvest project

• Building on previous work to setup & run community gardens
• New project aims to help more vulnerable adults to benefit from gardening
• **Activities:** volunteer advice, taster sessions, regular garden workdays, training & workshops
• **Outcomes:**
  • Improved physical health
  • Improved mental wellbeing
  • Increased skills & confidence
  • Improved sustainability of community gardens working with vulnerable adults
Client groups

- Adults with learning disabilities & autism
- Adults with experience of mental health issues, homelessness, abuse, substance/alcohol misuse
- Other volunteers
- Over 1500 people involved so far!
Monitoring & evaluation: Why

- Demonstrate impact to current funder
- Demonstrate impact to potential funders / other audiences
- Validate & measure anecdotal changes experienced
- Increase the evidence base (still needed?)
- Improve services
- Understand who benefits most
Monitoring & evaluation: Plans

• Collaboration with University of Essex experts with significant experience of nature-based evaluation

• Combination of standardised & bespoke tools (robust, flexible, not too onerous)

• Evaluation payment and/or staff support for projects to recognise time needed!
Monitoring & evaluation: Methods

• **Qualitative**: In-depth interviews, focus groups, informal feedback, quotes

• **Quantitative** evaluation: Five questionnaires, with guidance for staff and volunteers
  
  • **Snapshot**: Baseline and follow up

  • **Longer term changes**: Baseline and follow up

  • ‘Group’ questionnaire – accessible & discussion-based, but attributing change...

  • **Funder report** and engaging **interim report/case studies** in mind from the outset
Monitoring & evaluation: Tools

Validated tools

• Brief Resilience Scale
• Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

National survey questions

• ONS Life Satisfaction
• ONS Happiness
• Single-item physical activity

Local survey questions

• Fruit & veg
• Physical health

Bespoke: Self-esteem (adapted), meal prep, skills gained, social skills
Monitoring & evaluation: Methods - learning

- Redesigned and reworded to make them **clearer, more consistent, more positive** in their tone and more visually appealing
- Changed **questionnaires names and colour coded** to make it more obvious how they should be used
- New **guidance and face to face training** for staff and volunteers (highlighting importance of matched questionnaires)
Monitoring & evaluation: Overall learning

- Validated tools can appear complex/difficult to answer.
- Challenges of asking negative questions
- People skipping questions
- Conflicting answers compared to qualitative data? Distance travelled...
- Obtaining ‘match’ data can be tricky
- Baseline data for ongoing volunteers
- Low sample sizes may mean strange results
- Retrospective option
- More accessible tools needed!
- Benefits & challenges of using an external evaluator
Results: Wellbeing

- 96% reported improved happiness, mood or wellbeing (sample size = 232)
- Statistically significant 11% increase in reported happiness (sample size = 32 vulnerable adults, 10% significant increase for all participants, 68 sample)
- 80% reported that coming to the garden would have a long-term impact on them in future (sample size = 62)

“I suffer from anxiety and the gardening sessions are calming and boost my mood. I leave feeling more relaxed.”

“Sometimes when I am depressed I miss coming but I know that if I make the effort to get here I will instantly feel better.”
Results: Physical health

- 86% reported improved physical health (sample size = 160)
- 18% average improvement in health for vulnerable adults. (sample size = 36 vulnerable adults, compared to 5% increase for non-vulnerable adults)
- 11% reported an increase in portions of fruit & veg consumed (sample size = 18 vulnerable adults)

“Coming up to the allotment has influenced my diet changes. I now eat healthier food... Before I was coming to the allotment I was basically eating junk food.”

“I feel more confident, more healthy, I’m using every single muscle in my body. It’s exercise. I sleep better at night.”
Results: Skills & confidence

- 88% improved their skills or confidence (sample size = 236)
- 41% increase in ‘I often eat meals cooked from basic ingredients, either by myself or someone else.’ (sample size = 22 vulnerable adults)
- 69% increase in teamwork skills
- 49% increase in communication skills (sample size = 74 vulnerable adults)

“If I look back to how I was when I first started I have changed so much in my confidence and social skills so yes, that will change my future life.”

“I want to do more cooking. I made flat bread for the first time today and I never knew I could do that!”
Next steps

• Keep tweaking the forms
• Aim to get more matched data
• Keep improving accessibility
• Share our results
• Don’t forget qualitative data and stories!

“This garden is great because it’s accessible for all types of people. If someone has a disability you can always find something for them to do. There’s not many environments that there is such a variety of things that need to be done, that there’s something that everybody can do.”
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