

Case Study

Gardening for health & wellbeing

Introduction

There is an increasing recognition of the ways that gardening and getting outdoors can improve mental wellbeing and physical health – and the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership has found strong evidence for these changes through its work helping new people to get involved in gardening.

The Food Partnership operates a referral and advice service with a network of over 70 community gardens across Brighton & Hove. Anyone wanting to get involved in gardening can get advice about joining thousands of people growing food together across the city.

Most of these outdoor activities run throughout the week as flexible drop-ins. A few projects offer specialist or therapeutic programmes for participants with higher support needs.

A range of scientific literature provides evidence for the benefits of these activities – see www.growinghealth.info



Informal

Run by volunteers where it's as much about a chat and a cup of tea as gardening.

More formal

Run by larger organisations and charities, facilitated by permanent staff

Types of gardening opportunities



Specialist

Therapeutic activities and support for people with additional needs or mental health issues



Large scale

Some larger gardens focus on food production and food to sell

Local evidence for benefits

Evaluation of enquiries about gardening during 2014-15 found that:

58% of people who attended a Brighton & Hove weekly reported significant improvements to wellbeing after 3-6 months (using a validated tool*).

50% Even for those attending a few times, 50% showed a significant increase in wellbeing scores.

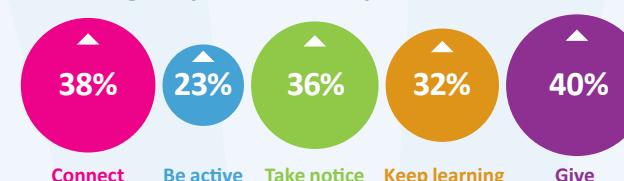
70% of all participants reported improved life satisfaction.

92% of all participants felt their garden experience would have a long-term, positive impact on their life.

50% of participants reported that they felt part of a 'community' more often since taking part.

We asked participants about changes in the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing'

Percentage improvements reported



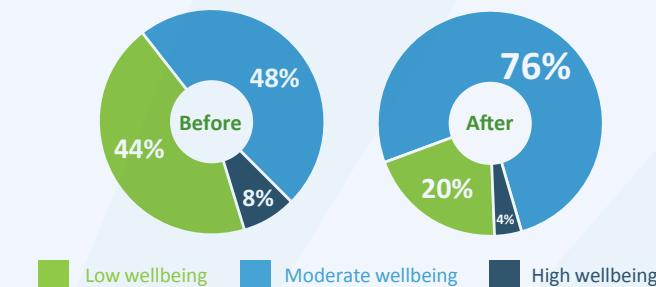
For participants who stated they had a disability (16% of all enquiries), 86% reported a significant improvement to wellbeing (and to life satisfaction) and these increases were almost double the average increase for other participants.



Of weekly attendees 42% increased the number of days of **physical activity** they do (23% for all participants) and 33% reported an improvement to **overall health** (27% for all participants).

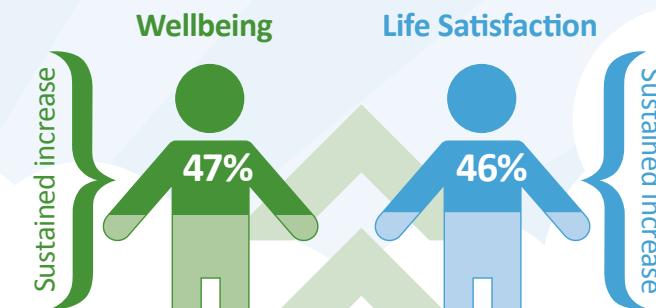


Wellbeing for attendees of community gardens*



Changes to wellbeing and life satisfaction remain strong even after 6-12 months

For participants completing follow-up surveys at 6-12 months, 47% showed a sustained increase in wellbeing scores and 46% sustained their increase in life satisfaction.





"Was able to deal with unnecessary stresses, as being outside and working with nature kept me grounded."



"Learning about all the projects going on and trying to work out where I can help has made me feel more optimistic about the future."



"Many thanks for referring me to volunteer... the whole thing exceeded my expectations... I felt that working with my hands and doing something practical was very therapeutic for me."



"More seasonal veg to bring home from the garden which I can't always afford at the shops"



"Volunteering in garden projects around Brighton & Hove made a huge difference to me when I was suffering from severe depression and anxiety... I had a reason to get out of bed again. I now wish that anyone who suffers from mental health problems gets the opportunity to take part in gardening projects like I did."



"It has made me feel more a part of the community and enabled me to meet loads of like-minded people."



"My mental wellbeing has changed immensely; before I started I was suicidal and did not see any point in living. Volunteering changed that... My mental wellbeing has increased since then, and I now feel a lot better."

Brighton & Hove Food Partnership

How we work

The Food Partnership gives advice about gardens to over 300 people each year, 35% of whom currently come via **referrals from local services** (such as mental health services, community groups and support workers). A **new referral form** was launched in July 2015 which allows health professionals such as GPs to easily refer patients for advice on gardening opportunities alongside other services such as weight management programmes and Health Trainer support. We hope this new process will allow even more people to try gardening and benefit as a result.

Who we work with

We estimate **33% of gardening enquiries have extra support needs** (eg learning disabilities, mental health issues, complex needs etc). Of the people contacting us for advice, 22% were unemployed and looking for work, 16% were unable to work due to disability and 6% were full-time carers. **50% of people had low wellbeing scores** when they initially enquired (41% moderate), suggesting that the majority of people we advised were already suffering or at risk from some form of mental ill health, so the improvements we have seen should make a big difference to future quality of life.

Policy context

Nationally, there is an increasing recognition of the benefits food growing can bring to a range of client groups, for both preventative and therapeutic reasons. The Food Partnership sits on the steering group for the national 'Growing Health' network coordinated by Sustain to share our experiences of this work.

The results and ways of working support a range of current policy agendas including:

- Public Health England '*From Evidence into Action: opportunities to protect and improve the nation's health*' (2014)
 - Mental health is as important as physical health
 - Inequalities must be narrowed
 - Recognition of the importance of place and building community assets
- Marmot Review (2010) our health and wellbeing is 70% driven by social determinants and only 30% by clinical factors
- Brighton & Hove's Happiness Strategy focus on both prevention for all, and focusing on those with vulnerabilities to mental health problems
- The Care Act's focus on wellbeing and prevention
- Priorities for Brighton & Hove CCG Operating plan (mental health, diabetes, better care and delivery of the city's dementia action plan)
- Priorities in BHCC's Corporate Plan (reducing inequalities, promoting good community relations, investment in early intervention, volunteering and active citizenship)

