



# GreengAge Evaluation Summary

## What is GreengAge?

The Big Lottery funded GreengAge project was set up in 2011 by the Welsh mental health charity Gofal. Gofal provides a wide range of services to people with mental ill health, supporting their independence, their health and well-being and their recovery. The GreengAge project combined Gofal's mental health expertise with horticulture to produce an innovative way of delivering befriending services. Gardening has many benefits both for physical and psychological wellbeing (Hawkins et al., 2013). The project offered opportunities for beneficiaries and volunteers alike to be involved in horticultural activities together, and aimed to improve wellbeing and reduce social isolation amongst older people in Cardiff. The project also worked with other voluntary

and community organisations to involve older people as contributors as well as recipients.

The GreengAge project ran for 3 and a half years (2011-2015). During this time while continuing to work with beneficiaries and volunteers, GreengAge extended its reach into care homes and day centres. Evidence suggests that despite being amongst others in settings such as care homes, people can still feel extremely isolated. A different approach was used in these settings and rather than befriending, a group work model was adopted. This promoted inclusion of all and graded activities incorporated the flexibility needed to respond to a variety of capabilities of the older people engaging in the activity.



## How was the project evaluated?

An independent evaluation of GreengAge was conducted by the Centre for Outdoor Activities and Leisure (COAL) research group. COAL is led by Dr Jenny Mercer and Dr Debbie Clayton and located in the Department of Applied Psychology at Cardiff Metropolitan University. The aim of the research group is to evaluate and understand the role that the outdoors, volunteering and purposeful leisure may play in enhancing health and well-being.

The research design incorporated two phase with phase one informing phase two.



Cardiff  
Metropolitan  
University

Prifysgol  
Metropolitan  
Caerdydd

### PHASE ONE - EXPLORATORY

- Shadowing case workers and volunteers
- Scoping workshop involving focus groups with volunteers, beneficiaries and staff
- Literature search

### PHASE TWO - MAIN DATA COLLECTION

- Interviews with beneficiaries, volunteers and staff
- Questionnaires with volunteers

## What were the outcomes?

Overall the project was well received by beneficiaries, volunteers and care homes and day centres who gave positive feedback about their involvement. The interviews demonstrated that individuals involved were highly committed to the project. The novel method of befriending, using gardening as a tool to engage both volunteers and beneficiaries, was highly effective and many other benefits were also noted for staff and older people in care homes and day centres.



## Beneficiaries

Friendship was an aspect beneficiaries highlighted as an important function of the GreengAge project. There was also evidence of a link between the beneficiaries' garden and their mood; as one declined so did the other. Beneficiaries reported their mood improved as a direct result of input from GreengAge.

*It's lovely and (.) somebody to talk about different things...I look forward to her coming because nobody comes around (.) to have a chat even if it's just (.) chatting about for different things. But I think this project has been very good.*

(Female beneficiary, aged 94)

*And then it looks neat and tidy and colourful, it cheers me up a lot. [and of seeing the crocuses in the lawn] And those were the first flowers that came up in the spring and cheered me immensely.*

(Female beneficiary, aged 78)

**Table 1:** Volunteers' Perspective: what GreengAge provides for the beneficiaries

<p><b>Positive impact on mood</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lifting the mood of the beneficiaries</li> <li>• Having a laugh</li> <li>• Provides enjoyment</li> </ul> 	<p><b>Company and friendship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular company</li> <li>• Someone to talk to</li> <li>• Someone to offload onto</li> <li>• A sounding board</li> </ul> 
<p><b>Gardening and physical activity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting them outside in the fresh air</li> <li>• Enabling people to enjoy their garden again</li> <li>• Doing tasks in the garden together</li> </ul>	<p><b>Building self-efficacy and optimism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging them to be more positive</li> <li>• Allowing them to take back control</li> <li>• Facilitating a better quality of life</li> <li>• Showing they are able to do things in the garden</li> </ul>

*They changed my life completely. I can sit out in the garden in the summer when the flowers are out and really enjoy myself. I couldn't do that for years.*

(Male beneficiary, aged 89)

**Table 2:** Beneficiaries' Perspective: what GreengAge provides for them

<p><b>Positive impact on mood</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Something to look forward to</li> <li>• Lifts mood seeing plants grow &amp; garden being tidy</li> <li>• Have a laugh</li> <li>• Lifts mood</li> <li>• Enjoyment</li> </ul> 	<p><b>Company and friendship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Someone to talk to</li> <li>• A friend</li> <li>• Friendship</li> <li>• Company once a week</li> <li>• Someone to listen and advise</li> </ul> <p><b>Relationship qualities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Someone who understands you</li> <li>• Someone that you can trust</li> <li>• Someone to talk about different things to</li> <li>• Someone to talk to with a common interest</li> </ul> 
<p><b>Gardening and physical activity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a kick start to maintain the garden</li> <li>• Someone to take away the mess from the garden</li> <li>• Hard work but enjoyable</li> </ul>	<p><b>Building self-efficacy and optimism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gain confidence</li> <li>• Befriender facilitates a more positive outlook</li> <li>• Sense of achievement</li> <li>• Encourages one to get out of the house</li> <li>• Peace of mind</li> </ul>

*[I] certainly found it rewarding you know (.) you know rewarding to myself... and it's definitely a good, good experience*

(Male volunteer, aged 54)

## Volunteers

The most important motivation for volunteering reported was 'values'. Other important motives and benefits were to learn more about the world, to improve their physical health and to feel a connection with nature. It also helped some increase their sense of worth and confidence.

Volunteers felt that GreengAge provided for them in 6 key areas:

- |                        |                                   |                           |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| • Helping others       | • Gardening and physical activity | • Positive impact on mood |
| • Knowledge and skills | • Affords positive view of self   | • Social interactions     |

*I think what was very rewarding was seeing-seeing these people who you thought probably wouldn't be capable of...very much achieving-achieving things...I mean, it may be very simple things but, you know, um (.) they clearly got satisfaction from it.*

(Male volunteer, aged 71)

*And when you've been unemployed for that long, you kind of say, "Oh, I can't do anything," you know...and then, slowly for this, it sort of opened up support work which is something I've never considered...basically it got me my job, where I am now. And it's totally sorted my life out, you know.*

(Male volunteer, aged 35)

## Care homes and day centres

The ethos of GreengAge matched those of the care homes and day centres. The client-centred, inclusive approach engendered trust between the project and care centre staff. The centre staff were impressed with the organisation and provision made by the GreengAge and felt the activities were thoughtfully planned and well implemented.

*I mean for the staff you know, someone's coming in with a ready-made activity. And it's (laughter) they know what they're doing, they've got the equipment and from a staff point of view it's brilliant.*

(Female care home staff)

*Oh, it's fantastic, yeah. And it was so much variety and it was very person-centred with a lot of the stuff we did, a lot of the activities that they brought...and the team's approach, you know, really. Everyone who came to us was, was brilliant.*

(Female care home staff)

## What are the implications of the GreengAge project?

Many of the findings can be directly linked with the New Economics Foundation (NEF) concept of 'Five Ways to Well-being' (NEF, 2011). The evaluation provides evidence that the GreengAge project has enabled beneficiaries to engage in four of these activities and volunteers to engage in all five.

Five Ways to Well-Being	Benefits from GreengAge
Connect	Company and Friendship
Be Active	Gardening and Physical activity
Take notice	Impact on mood and Optimism
Keep learning	Self-efficacy
Give	Helping others

Social isolation can be a particular concern for older people as physical health begins to restrict their involvement in social and recreational activities, which can lead to a deterioration in mental health and wellbeing (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). As people live longer, the proportion of older people will increase and issues related to social isolation will remain a very real concern.

In light of our ageing population and the austerity measures affecting a range of health and social care-related services, novel interventions, such as GreengAge may be more important than ever. Therefore it is crucial that such programmes are developed in a sustainable way in order to ensure continuity of service for all.

### References:

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