

Green Exercise Programme Evaluation

Natural England funded eight pilot projects, through local partnerships around the country, over three years (between 2008-11) to test the process of engaging hard to reach groups in green exercise activity. The aim of green exercise is to connect people to nature and encourage them to be more physically active in their local green spaces.

Green Exercise can be any informal, physical activity that takes place in a green space or the natural environment: from gardening, cycling and walking in urban green areas, to kite flying and conservation projects in the wider countryside.

What was done

A qualitative evaluation, examining participation in the programme of green exercise interventions, was conducted by Natural England staff between November 2009 and January 2010. Methods included focus groups, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. In total, 45 individuals, involved in green exercise, contributed to the evaluation.

The aim of the evaluation was to understand the extent to which the green exercise programme enabled hard to reach groups to access green space. Specific objectives were to understand:

- Participants' experiences of green exercise;
- what worked / didn't work so well;
- barriers to accessing green space;
- enablers to participation; and
- the extent to which the programme achieved a long term behaviour change in participants.

Results and conclusions

The findings show that overall the projects were successful in enabling a range of hard to reach groups to access green space through the various project interventions. However, whilst there is some evidence to suggest that some participants accessed green space outside of

the projects and post intervention, it is not clear what long-term impact the programme has had on their behaviour.

The findings also show that accessing local green space and having a positive environmental experience can have a range of knock-on effects including:

- Social benefits for both participants and the wider community, such as; opportunities for learning and development; increased physical activity and improved health and wellbeing; community cohesion and community participation.
- Environmental benefits for local green space such as; improved knowledge and awareness of local environmental issues and taking positive action to conserve and improve local green spaces.

Key messages

Participation in green exercise can:

- Increase people's access to local green space, by showing them where they can go and giving them confidence to visit these places independently.

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- Offer people positive experiences of nature that can increase awareness of local environmental issues and encourage people to take positive action for the natural environment through conservation volunteering.
- Provide opportunities for meeting new people and socialising in an informal and relaxed setting.
- Enable people to learn and develop new skills and knowledge which can broaden their horizons and are transferrable to home, work and school.
- Enable people to become more active outdoors and encourage them to try different kinds of physical activities.
- Help to improve people's physical health and wellbeing.

Natural England's view point

This report is relevant to Natural England's Outcome 2 objectives:

- People fully understand and value the contribution of the natural environment to the quality of our life.
- People increasingly take action to enhance the natural environment.
- People have places to access and enjoy a high quality natural environment.

This report provides an insight into people's experiences of green exercise and in particular the extent to which the green exercise programme has enabled hard to reach groups to access green space. It will be of interest to those who were involved in setting up and running the green exercise projects, in particular the project officers and the host partners. It may also be of use to other external partners and organisations who are planning to run similar

community engagement interventions with hard to reach groups.

Selected references

GREENSPACE SCOTLAND (2007)
Demonstrating the links - action research on greenspaces, URL:
www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/default.asp?page=210 [Accessed January 2011].

Further information

For the full details of the research covered by this information note see Natural England Research Report NERR039 – *Green Exercise Programme Evaluation*.

Natural England Research Reports and other technical publications are available to download from the Natural England website:
www.naturalengland.org.uk.

For further information contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0300 060 0863 or e-mail enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk.

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