



Decade of  
Health &  
Wellbeing

## Summary of Natural Choices for Health & Wellbeing Evaluation Report

# Five Ways to Wellbeing

The Five Ways to Wellbeing are simple things to try to build into our everyday lives that are proven to help us feel better.

**Connect...** with the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these will support and enrich you every day.

**Be Active...** go for a walk or run. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

**Take Notice...** Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

**Keep Learning...** try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.

**Give...** Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.

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The Five Ways to Wellbeing were developed by the new economics foundation (nef) based on an extensive international evidence base as part of the 2008 Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing.

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# Foreword



I was delighted to be involved in this programme from the outset as part of our approach to social value and sustainable development and working in partnership with communities. It was an innovative approach to engaging with people about health and wellbeing, in ways that made sense to them in their communities.

As the projects got underway, the scale and intensity of what they were achieving became evident, particularly when groups came together and shared their stories. It was clear that the work was hard work, heartfelt and inspiring. And it was all done in the second wettest year on record!

This programme is testimony to the talent, skills, commitment, and passion that exists in all of our communities in Liverpool. It is an example of how we can work together in new ways to make a real difference in people's lives.

I would like to offer my congratulations and sincere thanks to everyone involved in making the 38 projects such a resoundingly successful programme.

**Dave Antrobus**  
NHS Liverpool Clinical  
Commissioning Group Lay Member





# Background

 Home to more green space than any city outside London, as well as many highly skilled organisations and individuals, Liverpool is at the vanguard of the green space agenda. There is a growing understanding how this incredible asset can best serve our people and economy.

The Liverpool Green Infrastructure Strategy, jointly commissioned from The Mersey Forest by Liverpool City Council and Liverpool Primary Care Trust, was the first of its kind in the UK. The strategy and action plan identifies green infrastructure (that's green spaces and environmental features, including the river) across the city and the potential functions it can serve, including promoting health and wellbeing.

Evidence of the positive effects of green space for health and wellbeing and tackling health inequalities is hugely compelling and includes the Marmot review and NICE guidance. Given this strong evidence base at national and local level, a pilot scheme to utilise, create and improve community green spaces for health and wellbeing was undertaken in 2012. This document summarises the formal evaluation of the programme which was undertaken by the University of Essex. It includes case studies of the individual projects, as well as reflection from the projects at a joint meeting to consider the results of their activity so far, and how they will keep the momentum going in the future. The full evaluation report is available from: [www.merseyforest.org.uk](http://www.merseyforest.org.uk)



# About the Natural Choices for Health & Wellbeing Programme



 The Natural Choices programme aimed to promote health and wellbeing in Liverpool residents by utilising natural environments and the talents and interests of communities. The innovative approach was hugely popular in communities, with a very strong response to the opportunity from across the city. A total of 38 projects were finally selected for funding based on a range of criteria, including potential for health outcomes. These formed the collaborative programme, which took place throughout 2012 and was funded by Liverpool Primary Care Trust and run in partnership with The Mersey Forest.

The programme had clear aims and was also structured around the following principles:-

- Supporting community assets and community project design
- Targeting of resources to tackle inequalities, according to evidence base.
- The five ways to well being

The projects addressed a range of issues at grassroots level with fantastic results. The University of Essex conducted a programme evaluation and each project reported their progress using a template provided by the PCT. The University of Essex report demonstrated that:-

- **The programme met its aims and objectives**
- **Wellbeing improved by 18% among participants. Comparable initiatives have demonstrated improvements of around 10%.**
- **Wellbeing shifted from below average to above average compared to the mean score for Liverpool's population**
- **Over 80% of projects reported increased physical activity as a key part of their project's achievements**



# What the Programme Achieved



The Natural Choices programme demonstrated the following outcomes:-

Developed social capital and cohesion

Reduction in social isolation

Increase in interest, engagement, and achievement of participants, including formal qualifications

Improved, self-esteem self-efficacy and overall wellbeing and mental health

Increase in physical activity

Partnerships between participant projects and with other agencies

Lasting impact for participants and in some communities

Improvements to local community environments

Considerable social cost savings



The Natural Choices programme demonstrated the following outputs:-

38 projects

44 weeks delivery

867 volunteers

135 people employed

3,274 participants in:

1,243 events

100 partners

£300,000 investment



The project had very low cost of £2.14 per participant per week – made possible by the considerable dedication, voluntary effort and passion of the delivery organisations and individuals. Social cost savings were calculated which demonstrate a range of spending that can be avoided by these activities, and costs for mental ill health, for example, which could be either avoided, or redirected to achieve greater return on investment through these innovations.

Participants included young children to elderly people, including a 91 year old! Also involved were people with learning difficulties, mental or physical disabilities, mental illness, unemployed and homeless people, families seeking asylum and young people with behavioural or emotional difficulties. The participants were largely from very deprived areas experiencing significant health inequalities.



Communities were asked to design their own projects, responding to local needs and assets within the broad framework of improving health and wellbeing utilising local environments. This enabled a tailored approach pertinent to and produced by communities themselves. The aims projects set for themselves fell into seven key areas:

Gardening and food growing

Physical activity

Skills and educational development

Creation or improvement of the environment

Developing connections with others and the environment

Mental health

Community support



# Social Connections



“Development of an integrated local community support network.”

“Young people are keen to help pensioners.”

“Activities like plant sales helped the group to connect further with the public, as they were given the opportunity to share their new knowledge.”

“It makes me feel happy meeting new friends.”

During the programme, participants connected to each other and their communities, to other communities through the sharing of knowledge and skills, and with their environment.

These connections were cited as beneficial and often generated friendships that were formed outside of arranged activities. Joint events contributed to the success of the projects and the programme as a whole enabling projects to work collaboratively, sharing experience, skills and resources. This approach has formed a unique network of partners across the city willing to collaborate in such projects and recognising strength in forming a network to do so.

“It’s been great to feel part of this and very connected to all these projects.”

“It’s been totally reassuring to have this event and see how it all comes together - feel part of something bigger, be supported and be able to make good connections.”



# Being Active



“This keeps me fit by shifting things, bending down, picking things up, using the brush and doing a lot of lifting.”

“The amount of regular physical activity delivered has been extraordinary.. People regard this as their own ‘gym’, labouring and sweating to their hearts content.”

“When I was cutting the trunks out of the soil and the roots it was quite hard and it kind of got my anger out.”

“Each week there was at least three hours of physical activity; this meets the weekly recommendation...”

“Many of the young people felt that as a result of this project they now choose to spend more time outside being active.”

“Disabled people become more integrated by working with non-disabled people in an active setting.”

Four key ‘activity’ themes emerged from the projects:

**Projects encouraged participants to engage in physical activity**

**They supported activity requiring team work and socialising**

**Promoted activities which contributed to fitness, health and wellbeing**

**Created safe environments to enable physical activity. More than 85% of projects encouraged participants to take part in physical activity and 19% found that their projects promoted activity sufficient to improve fitness. Very few projects actually recruited on this basis.**



# Being Mindful and Taking Notice



“The location provides a safe haven, an escape, for residents who have not experienced working in the outdoors or in agricultural settings. Feedback indicates that they enjoy being in a completely different environment from the hostel or the streets.”

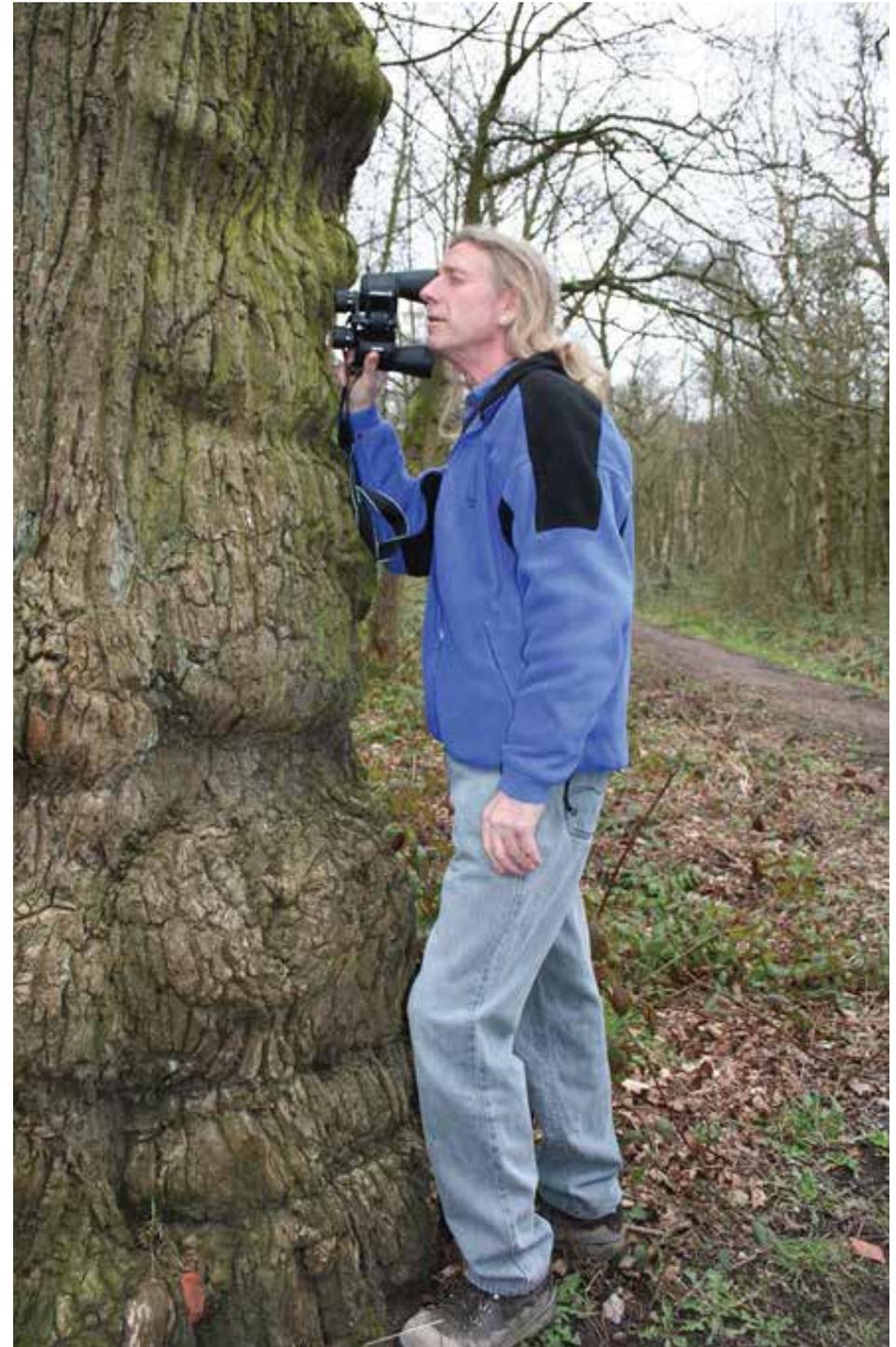
“We always just walk past this woodland, now I think me, my dad and the dog will come here again and explore it more.”

“Sitting in the August sun watching the workers in the garden making a lovely place even more beautiful.”

“We have become better aware and informed about our local environment including history and architecture.

We have also become more attuned to the natural environment- flowers, trees, birds and the changing seasons...”

The participants developed an increased awareness, knowledge and interest in their local natural environment and took part in conservation activities. Over 50 % of projects helped participants to become more aware of their environment and 35 % helped people to enjoy being in nature, known to have positive psychosocial effects.





# Keep Learning



“The best lesson we have ever had.”

“Children are outside and engaged... doing something practical and that in itself can be therapeutic...a release... turning the soil over...caring for plants and watching them grow has a better effect psychologically than anything that we could teach in lessons or that circle-time could deliver...”

“92 % feel they know more about growing and want to keep learning.”

“We shared recipes and cooked outdoors, learning new ways of using fresh fruit and vegetables in our everyday lives.”

There was a significant learning aspect in all projects, which ranged from basic learning about growing healthy food, to 26 % of projects helping participants to enrol on a course or gain a qualification. Projects also reported how people had shared knowledge and ideas, explored their natural environment, and learned about themselves and working in groups. The majority of projects (over 70 %) helped participants to learn about nature: “Participants have learned how to care for the plants from seed to harvest, not only while working under supervision, but also independently in their own back yards.”



# Giving



“...I get job satisfaction from coming here and making everybody happy and helping others when I can be of assistance to them.”

“Community members are now volunteering to help sustain the environment.”

“Volunteers have been invaluable in keeping up the watering and feeding the bees, but most of all getting the word out to more participants in the community. We were overwhelmed with how many volunteers got behind the Food for Real Festival and really made it their own.”

“Local children and young people became involved in planting up the raised beds with a variety of

vegetables. These were used in cookery sessions within the centre and given out to local people.”

“One volunteer wanted to work full time on the site, helping the tutors and cascading his knowledge to other participants, especially helping those with physical/learning disabilities.”

The Natural Choices programme demonstrated the considerable capacity to engage people through local environmental projects. With almost 900 volunteers involved, the projects harnessed the capacity of giving and sharing to generate increased wellbeing. Approximately 43% of projects identified that their participants were involved in volunteering, both within and outside of the project.



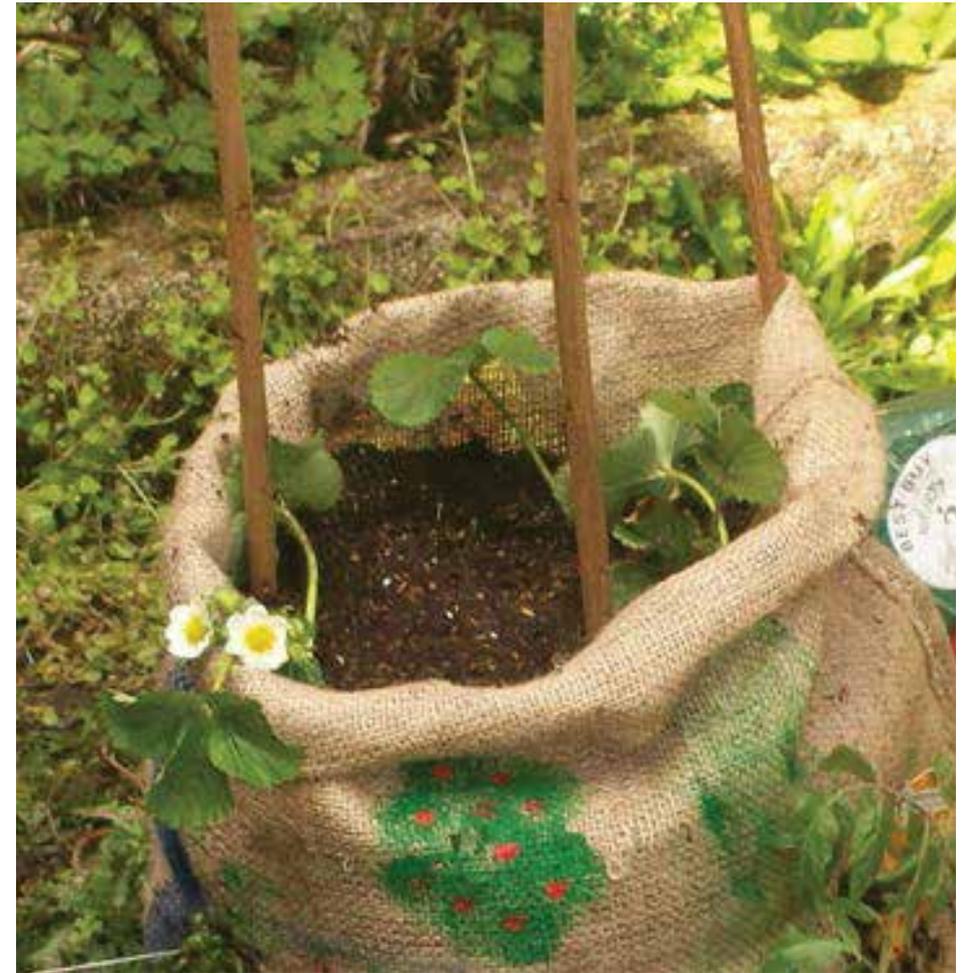
# Liverpool World Centre

## Global Garden

This intergenerational project improved the mental and physical health of people through the creation of African bag gardens to enable participants to recognise the range of benefits arising from growing their own food and flowers.

Over the summer groups enjoyed arts sessions, decorating the bags, and subsequently planting them with vegetables, herbs and flowers. The bags were displayed locally at sites of Asylum Link, Refugee Action and Plus Dane's Vienna Court Sheltered Housing.

"One day I found that the participants had tied string to the stakes that supported the planted bags, and had hung flags of their countries of origin between each one."



# New Land: Engaging with communities

## Family Refugee Support Project

This project created a wonderful therapeutic garden space in High Park Street, Liverpool 8 for refugee and asylum-seeking families. The funding provided horticultural support and weekly therapy as well as expanding the group's work with other community members.

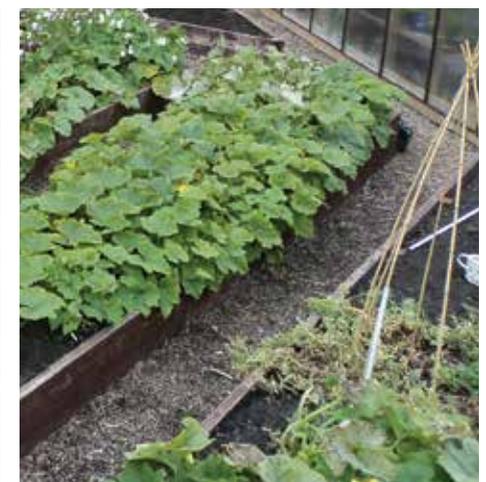
The garden now allows families a place to be together that is calm and peaceful; it allows family members to work and play together, and rebuild their relationships. Some problems and experiences take time to talk about and understand.

Using the garden and building trusting relationships helped people to make sense of difficulties and be understood.

"This is a healthy place. Not just physically but emotionally. It is healthy to have vegetables."

"The project gives us hope - there was no-one else to help us before and this was a very bad time."

"I feel less anxious and more relaxed after coming here. I can sleep better at night."



# Happy Hedges Healthy People

## Rice Lane City Farm



The project has been working with families, children and vulnerable adults to develop their skills in hedge laying and land management to rejuvenate the hedges and meadows within Rice Lane City Farm in the north of the city.

There have been monthly sessions led by a professional hedger, followed by weekly sessions lead by farm staff.

"We have widened our work within the local community, developed relationships with new people and other community groups.

There has been a significant number of older people and more engagement of the community."

It allowed us more time to look at partnership work, helping to strengthen our links with the Black Environment Network to deliver a more diverse service.



# Mini Allotments

## St Michael's and Lark Lane Community Association

Training and assistance was given for local people to grow their own vegetables and flowers.

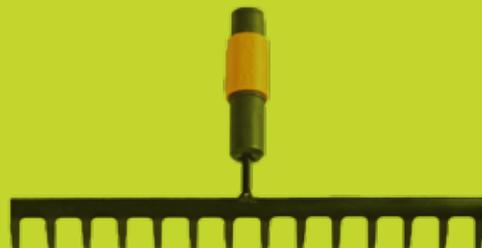
The planting has transformed a training area into mini allotments, using re-cycled containers and raised beds and encouraged a wider interest in horticulture with local people.

The aim was to improve the physical and mental health of participants, including improved nutrition, and to reduce the serious levels of social isolation.

The insatiable demand for pots and other containers inspired a competition for the best "Novelty Container" and generated a great deal of interest and amusement.

Participants almost without exception enjoyed the physical work involved in horticultural activity.

"The session was great, the girls helped me plant a combination of herbs and flowers; they talked to me about the plants that I had sown and told me how to care for them. I learned a lot at the session and will come again."



# Diggers Start Up

## Friends of Everton Park Diggers Group

The Friends Diggers group recruited local volunteers and transformed a derelict space into a community growing site alongside Faith Primary School in the North of the city. The project also helped to rejuvenate Everton Park by refurbishing the nature garden to increase public access, as well as developing and planting a small fruit orchard and lavender field within the park.

"The amount of regular physical activity delivered has been extraordinary. Perhaps 12 people regard this opportunity as their own "gym" - sweating and labouring to their heart's content."

"This project has provided fun and learning combined. It has also acted as a brilliant catalyst in stimulating other projects and ideas into the wider Everton park arena."

"We have worked with some pretty damaged folk, those who are recovering from a variety of abuses and illnesses



# A Brighter Space

## Macbeth Street Tenant's Association



Local residents came together from the Kirkdale area of the city to consult with neighbours on the use of a small open space to establish an accessible community vegetable garden.

Children got involved in growing things for the first time.

Containers and trees were planted to enhance the appearance of unused spaces and through the maintenance of these the community has become more active and built up better relationships.

"It has improved the appearance of the area and makes it nicer and feel better when you leave the house.

What was great was how much more positive people feel about living on the Macbeth Estate. This came out in the survey, and also in comments made on the street.

There's been no vandalism. All this is creating an area that feels cared for."



# The New Belve Sports and Community Centre

## From Seed to Plate

This project changed an unused and poorly maintained inner city back yard into a vibrant community garden that allowed the residents of Toxteth to show pride in their community and at the same time improved their physical and mental health. Over the summer there were a large number and range of people inspired and interested to catch the "Horticulture Bug", and participants bonded together from different abilities.

"The best bit of the project was the participation and interest by local residents and groups to become involved. By working with the groups we have reached local residents that wouldn't normally attend centres like ours."



# Writing Well Writing Green

## North End Writers

This award winning creative writing project for Liverpool residents with mental health conditions and disabilities used Stanley Park as inspiration for writing and celebrating the natural environment. There were regular sessions walking in the park, finding materials, sharing memories, as well as taking photographs, reading and writing sessions. A beautiful patchwork quilt was produced incorporating a piece from each project member, as well as a book of creative writing which has been used to promote and challenge discriminatory attitudes to mental ill health.

"A friendly and welcoming group - it has encouraged socialising, conversation and writing."

"This project has shown me that it is good to enjoy the open spaces, which I do more of now."



# Green Steps

## City of Liverpool YMCA



The Green Steps project engaged homeless people in developing derelict land for growing fresh produce. All produce from the sites was distributed among local agencies which support homeless people.

Residents of the YMCA who were involved in the site reported that it felt a safe haven and an escape, particularly for those who had not experienced working in the outdoors or in agricultural settings. Feedback indicated that they enjoy being in a completely different environment from the hostel or the streets.

Horticultural courses provided those long term unemployed, previously homeless, and rough sleepers who had no qualifications the opportunity to succeed at something which is instantly rewarding, and 13 accreditations were achieved.

This project has also helped in encouraging people to take pride in their community, through a number of community clean up days involving both parents and children.

"Doing this course and working on the farm has saved my life. It has stopped my heavy drinking and given me something to look forward to."



# Kensington and Fairfield Community Growing Space

## Healing Space

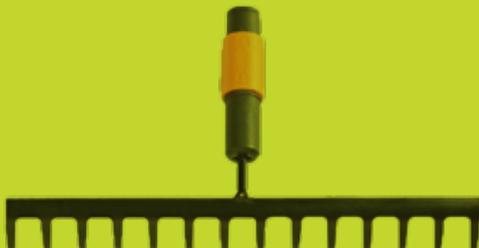
This project enabled people living in Kensington/Fairfield to convert a derelict plot into a community growing resource and then provided six week courses on planting and plant care as well health and wellbeing in the community.

The group worked with women at a bail hostel; a BME centre and a homeless facility.

None of the group had previously cared for plants, but all successfully raised healthy seedlings. One person became so confident she bought an inexpensive plastic greenhouse and volunteered to nurture more seedlings for the group. Others used the harvested food products to cook seasonal meals, made their own herbal teas to enhance wellbeing, created bath products to aid relaxation, and creams and lotions to treat minor ailments.

"The project has brought together a diverse section of our community who would not otherwise meet or spend time together.

People have enjoyed spending time together and feel proud of what they have achieved."



# Roots 'n' Shoots

## Daisy Inclusive UK



Individuals, communities and organisations joined together to plant, grow, harvest, cook and eat produce from an accessible allotment in Old Swan. Some of the finest crops grown were the giant pumpkin, giant onions, cucumbers, chillis, tomatoes, rhubarb, carrots and potatoes. The project promoted healthy eating and wellbeing as well as teaching gardening skills.

Through working with other allotment holders who offered advice, support and assistance an integrated local community support network was created. The project developed from roots to shoots, starting with theoretical information, leading onto planting, growing, identification, enjoyment, eating and preserving the harvest. Each participant took away greater understanding of where their food comes from, enjoyment of the outdoors, and a greater sense of personal wellbeing.

"I loved the inclusive aspect of all people working together."

"It was great that the allotment became more than just for growing - it was a community space for summer activities such as hide and seek, treasure hunts, BBQ and much more."



# Roots, Fruits and Leaves

## Faiths4Change

Working in partnership with a core group from Asylum Link Merseyside, residents and schools around Overbury Street in L7 this project provided workshops and support to residents to enable people of all ages to plant and care for food, trees and seeds and to discover biodiversity in their neighbourhood. Twelve workshops were held covering biodiversity recording, food and nutrition and tree planting. Nearly 300 participants attended including school children, community residents, asylum seekers, carers and parents. This project provided opportunities for children, local people, vulnerable and disengaged groups to connect to each other and to their local community through food and gardening based workshops; to keep learning about gardening and healthy food, about other cultures and about nature and to be active in the outdoor

"The experience has been extremely positive and one that we are keen to continue."



# Potters Allotment Growing Scheme

## ARCH



This project was organised by ARCH and saw participants harvesting, preserving and cooking their own homegrown produce at Chapel House Farm Allotments in Garston. This activity provided those involved with opportunities to keep their minds and bodies active.

Participants enjoyed an improved social network and reported a better understanding of their environment. They also said that they felt both physically and mentally fitter.

"The first night I had a salad, the second I had a roast. I sat there on my own and I felt so proud of the meal in front of me that we had grown.

"I enjoyed every bit, and all it cost was the price of two chops and some ice cream."

"Now when I go to the local social club, people shout my name and ask me to sit with them.

"We used to chat about the allotment, but now we talk about all sorts - family friends, and everyday life."

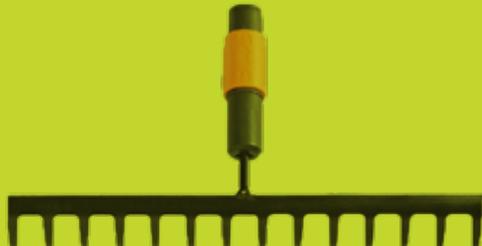


# Football Pitches

## Parks Options

The project helped to transform a neglected area of brownfield land at Jubilee Park, Kensington, into two high quality grass surface football pitches. This is improving the local environment and encouraging greater use of Jubilee Park.

"The best bit was seeing the completed pitches and experiencing a sense of accomplishment and pride."



# The Breckfield Diggers

## Breckfield and North Everton Neighbourhood Council

Engaging local residents of all ages to gain the skills to develop a piece of waste land was central to this scheme. Volunteers have transformed Venmore Street in Everton from an eyesore into an inspiring local resource, with a community garden and a large wildflower meadow just outside the entrance to Anfield football ground. As a result volunteers continue to be engaged and participate in other community environmental programmes.

This led to the group developing additional green space at The Breckfield Centre; creating an allotment and garden at Thirlmere Court; and developing a project called alphabet soup, which involved residents and volunteers making soup out of the produce they grew.

"We really loved coming together as a community to showcase our work and learn from each other."



# Our Garden

## Cohiba



This project created three sustainable gardens at the Kumba Imani Millennium Centre in Liverpool 8.

The rear of the building was completely re-designed with raised flower beds, potato planters, tomato planters and propagation areas. The gardens were designed developed, nurtured and sustained by service users and residents of two mental health support agencies.

Participants said they found it a pleasure to attend the garden activities and just to 'be' in the garden environment. There have also been positive responses about enhancing and building healthy sleep patterns.

One member attended the garden every single day. According to the project lead, the garden has helped his mental health and also his relationships with other people inside and out of the centre. He has become a more responsible person.

"The best bit was everyone enjoying eating fresh vegetables and noticing the difference in taste."

The general public used to throw rubbish in the front garden. However, since we laid woodchips to stop the weeds, the area has become more attractive - the tipping has stopped!"



# A Haven of Greenspace

## The Haven Project

A horticultural programme in three schools in the Kensington and Fairfield Ward worked with children identified by teachers as suffering emotional, behavioural or social difficulties. Over six months, groups of twelve children designed and created a garden space using horticultural therapy and explored environmental and wellbeing themes in connection to the garden.

The project had a noticeable positive impact upon pupils' confidence; communication skills; interpersonal relationships and sense of pride

"I am starting to get to know more people now and be more friendly."

"I noticed that worms were coming out the soil, the soil is like an underground network with thousands of worms."



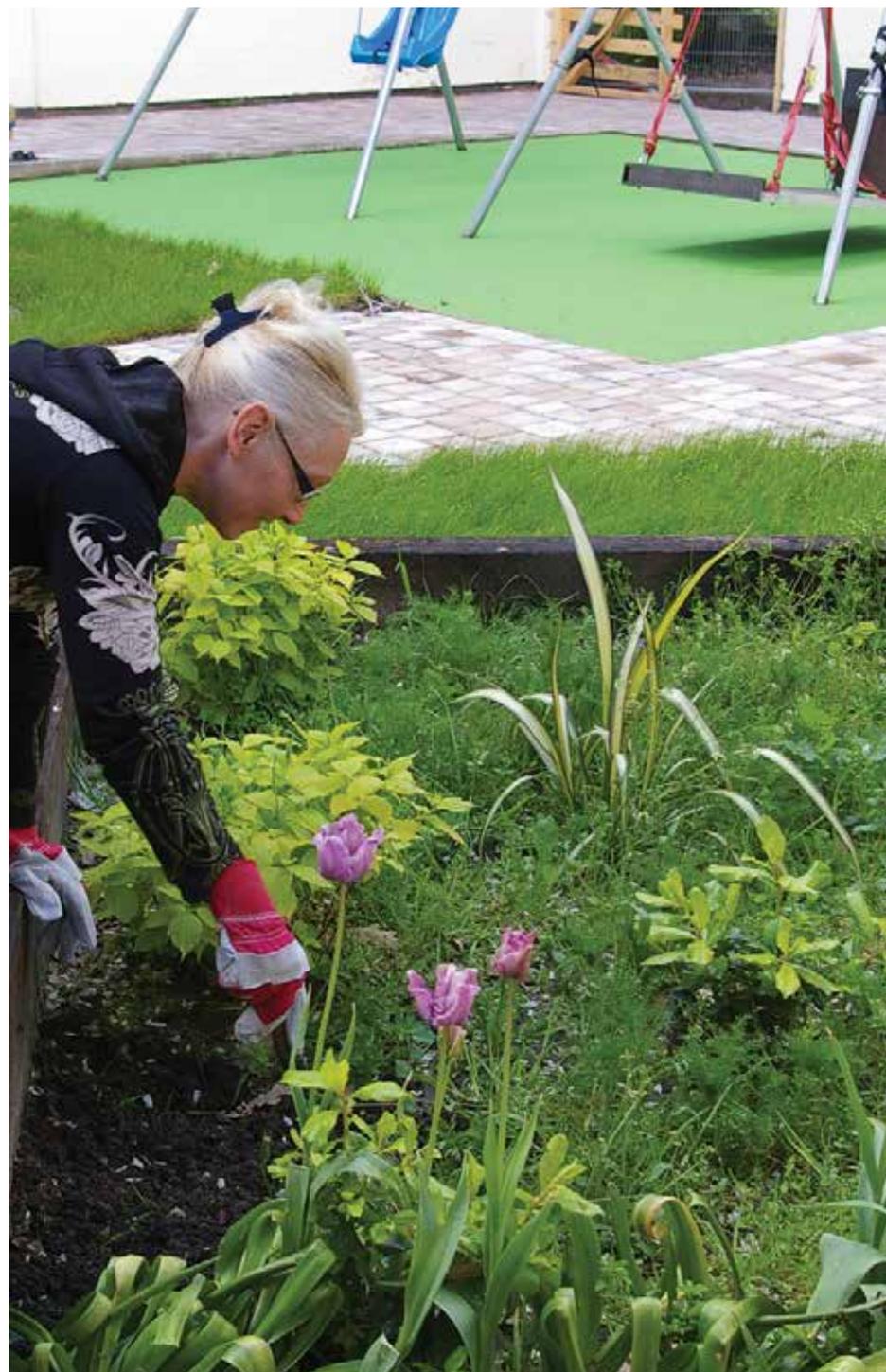
# Zoe's Place Sensory Garden

## Zoe's Place Baby Hospice

A new sensory garden and play area have been created in the grounds of a hospice which is a safe environment for children from across Merseyside to use. The space was unused but the new environmentally friendly garden has benefited families visiting and staying at the hospice. It is known that sensory environments have huge benefits for children with life threatening or life limiting conditions helping to support interaction, discovery and communication.

As a result of the project an art therapist will be providing sessions that will take place and make use of the garden and resources within.

"We have made fantastic connections through this fund with other community projects and with local businesses and members of the community who wanted to support us with volunteering or donations."



# Friends of Millwood and Alderwood



This project connected local people with Millwood and Alderwood in Speke, helping to protect and improve ancient woodlands through practical activities and events. Throughout the project, activities were promoted to encourage residents to get involved.

As a result, the project connected local people who previously didn't know each other through group health and photo walks and consequently developed new friendships. Everyone reported improved wellbeing and enjoyment as a result of being part of a group and talking, walking and exploring with others.

"We have really broken down barriers between the generations and strangers have become friends as a result of the project.

The pupils' parents stop and talk to us because their children shout our names out across the street, and we are talking to more and more people."



# The Urban Enviro Gym

## The Woman's Organisation

This was a fun and creative opportunity for women from diverse communities to become involved in a sustainable volunteer project of planting and maintaining a garden in the Baltic Triangle area of the city.

The project promoted health and wellbeing whilst helping to improve an industrial area that has suffered significant decay.

The project was successful in involving women from business, residential and service user communities, who worked well together and through the activity developed friendships outside of the sessions.

"As a group we developed as a team, at times we used negotiation skills to come to an agreement about the garden plan and collaborated to create a garden.

We have also learned patience as we have put in a lot of work and time, but will not see the garden flourish until next spring."



# Forest School Speke

## Community Forest Trust

The Forest School Speke project was created to sow the seeds of outdoor education into the community, and connect local children and their families both with their local environment and each other. This project offered Forest School to all under fives in Speke by providing training for teaching staff.

The project provided all the children with regular outdoor activities whilst connecting them with nature, providing the confidence and interest to enjoy their local environment and developing the stage for the long term.

"This is the best lesson we have ever had."

"I climbed a tree and swung off the branches, it felt amazing."

"We always just walk past this woodland, now I think me, my dad and the dog will come here again and explore it more."



# Five Seasons

## Five Children and Families Trust



This project created a community garden on a plot of land at a local fire station, and provided weekly training sessions for families to grow vegetables and flowers.

Families experienced planting, harvesting and cooking food together, then transferred that knowledge acquired during sessions to growing plants and cooking healthily at home.

This empowered parents who realised that they now have the ability to influence their family in terms of activities, health, food benefits, and education.

"We now eat more vegetables and soups. And I'd like to make more recipes like the frittata we made."

"I learnt more about the environment; I learnt about the benefits of healthy eating, I learnt about local and seasonal food, I learnt about growing my own food, I met new people; I developed my cooking skills, I found opportunities for team work, and we had fun together outdoors."



# Brontescape

## Bronte Youth and Community Centre



Through growing vegetables, cooking and eating fresh produce, Brontescape has been providing opportunities to all residents across the St.Andrews area of the city to create healthy lifestyles.

An area has been developed which now offers play equipment, sensory plants, flowers and a vegetable plot - creating an ideal opportunity for families to come together in a clean and safe environment. This project has also helped in encouraging people to take pride in their community; through a number of community clean up days involving both parents and children.

This helped in bringing members of the community together, helping to break down barriers and improving community cohesion.



# Minestrone Garden

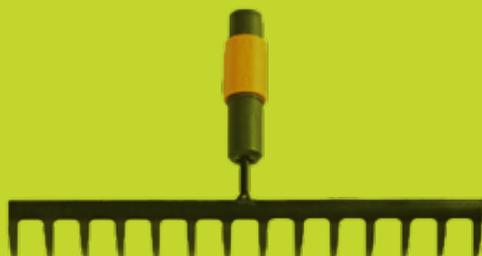
## Rotter's Community Composting



The Minestrone Garden provided the opportunity to teach participants from 6 to 89 from different backgrounds and life experiences how to grow fruit and vegetables. Based at different growing sites around Speke and Garston, the aim was to improve the health and wellbeing of participants and families through exercise and healthy eating.

The project improved the local community by enhancing the local neglected green spaces. The beneficiaries are now growing champions in their own right, carrying their learning in their school projects into their own gardens. Some project members still attend as volunteers because they have enjoyed it so much that they do not want to finish.

"One of the best aspects was to give people confidence, self esteem and learn new skills."



# The Urban Green Team

## PSS Nature in the North

Funding enabled the development of a team of local residents and PSS service-users to offer a tidy up service for the front area of people's properties which were overgrown in Anfield. As part of the garden tidy up service residents were provided with a 'nature/nurture' kit which included locally made bird feeders, bird boxes, health information and a guide to basic gardening.

The project brought together a diverse range of personalities, experiences and backgrounds to form a strong sense of teamwork and cohesion. Many of the volunteers went on to volunteer for other projects, others received certificates for passing accredited training and lots of the volunteers additionally joined the Anfield Walking club adding other opportunities to get active.

"One of the most important parts of the process was sitting down with a hot drink after the garden was finished and appreciating what we have achieved in half a day's work."



# Kensington Grows

## Local Solutions



The project created a sustainable community growing space in the heart of Kensington - a place for people to come together to grow their own vegetables, fruit and flowers and take part in healthy outdoor activities.

Over the summer the local community and groups, such as young homeless people, unpaid carers and people with disabilities, developed their skills and interests in gardening and healthy lifestyles.

Participants enjoyed the physical side of working in an allotment and the health benefits of cooking and eating their own produce. Many participants indicated that this training raised their energy levels and improved their physical stamina.

An unplanned outcome was two new bee hives on site. There are plans to engage parents and children from the school next door to deliver beekeeping training.

"The best part of the project was being able to develop a fantastic community growing space in the heart of a deprived urban area."



# Heat, Eat and Greet

## Parish Power



Throughout the year, the residents of L6 have been engaged in workshops to build containers to grow food to help reduce the number of households who are faced with the impossible decision of whether to heat or eat.

As a result, excellent relationships with two school and church communities have been built up and children have wanted to continue to grow food at home over the school summer holidays.

"One of the best bits has been to secure additional funding so that we can continue working with the two schools to develop an outdoor classroom and the school's gardening clubs."



# Croxteth Children's Allotment

## Neighbourhood Services Company

This project created an allotment at Larkin's Farm, Croxteth, converting half an acre of wasteland into a secure children's allotment.

During the summer, over two hundred junior school children were introduced to resources at the farm such as nature trails, woodland walks, and food growing.

Only a small number of children had had any hands-on experience of planting or growing vegetables.

As a result parents and children have expressed their renewed enthusiasm in growing at home.

"I learned how far apart to grow cabbages and potatoes and I didn't know what herbs tasted like before."

"My friends like gardening but I imagined that they didn't like gardening."



# Growing Creativity

## The Bluecoat



A group of learning disabled and vulnerable adults were engaged in a Creative Gardeners' Group at the Bluecoat.

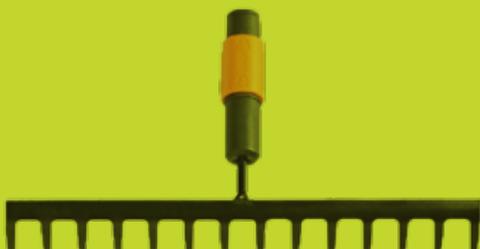
This equipped them with appropriate skills and knowledge to develop a new planting scheme for areas of the existing garden at the heart of the Bluecoat as well as support the long term maintenance of the garden.

As the project progressed the participants got to connect with each other and the wider Bluecoat community and became more active. As many participants were older, many felt they could not achieve certain things at first, but this changed as the project progressed.

"I like the project and made loads of friends & I really enjoyed coming to the project."

"It makes me feel happy meeting new friends."

"This keeps me fit by shifting and moving things, bending down, picking things up and using the brush and doing a lot of lifting."



# Green Fingers Project

## Frances Taylor Foundation

The aim of this project was to extend a gardening club from a specially adapted allotment for use by physically disabled people as well as by able-bodied people in supported housing in the Garston area.

"This project has been a roaring success for us, and has enabled us to maintain a club that would almost certainly have had to finish after we lost the garden in Knolle Park."

"Having this grant has enabled us to expand out to the houses and it means we can now continue to sustain this past the life of the project, meaning we can continue to develop and promote the positive health benefits of working in the garden, both mentally and physically - not to mention developing all important social skills within the group."



# Edible Community Garden

## Rotunda

The work at Rotunda over the year has been to develop an accessible community garden for all residents of Kirkdale.

Over the summer, the community came together with young and older generations growing and eating together.

Young people worked with people with physical disabilities to grow produce.

People of all ages and abilities gave freely of their skills, knowledge and self, some a little and some a lot - all as valuable as each other.

"The best bit was people saying that connecting with the earth, digging and growing made them feel good about themselves, and that being outside also helped with stress."



# Seed to Soup

## L'Arche Liverpool

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The aim of the project was to promote wellbeing and healthy eating among people with and without learning disabilities. By using an existing sensory garden and building new raised vegetable beds an existing green space was safeguarded within the Kensington area of the city. The result was increased physical activity for individuals as they learnt new skills and connected with other participants and volunteers. Volunteers were instrumental to the project - more continued to join and many increased their hours.

By the end of the project everyone had grown, prepared and eaten their own vegetables.

Renovation of the garden is continuing, winter vegetables have been planted and it is hoped to increase the space by making more raised beds.

"We now have social worker referrals to our project."

"We have been able to network with other organisations to our great benefit."



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# Windsor Grassroots & Greenshoots

## Squash Nutrition

This project supported and developed a local food producing culture in Liverpool 8 using interactive activities, innovative training and film documentation that enhanced community wellbeing and cohesion. Creative, community health activity and seasonal, environmental engagement with residents from diverse backgrounds and ages was undertaken. Two food gardens were developed with skills training around health; beekeeping; environmental education and empowerment.

As a result, the food fence and vertical growing walls have been noticed by many passers-by who have struck up conversations or been encouraged to pick a few broad beans or

"Bee-keeping requires more physical activity than anticipated! Moving frames full of bees and honey (that can weigh up to 2.5 kilos each) can be a real workout, especially wearing a full bee suit on a hot roof!"



# Growing Altfinch

## Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse Theatres

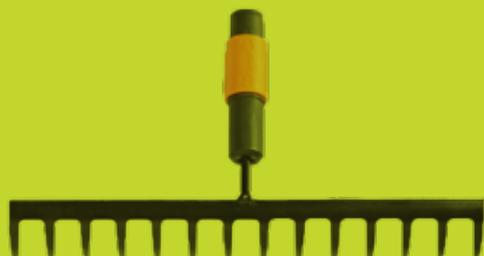
Artists and creative gardening approaches such as 'seed bombs' encouraged local children and parents to get involved in the regeneration of Alt Finch Close and the surrounding area. The aim was to leave a lasting visible physical change in the area that has been informed by the community at the same time promoting social interaction and greater community spirit.

People gave their time in planning and design meetings, clear up days and garden build days. One of the residents organised a community BBQ which acted as a catalyst to parents getting involved with the project. Additional funding has meant that the garden has continued to develop, as well as activities both in and out of the garden.

"I love watching football but it's better to be outside doing something."

"We can hand out veg to all the old folk, so that they get fresh veg."

"Help us build a garden so that we can all be friends."



# Single Men's Hostel Gardening Project

## St Michael's in the Hamlet with Christ Church

This community based project within a hostel for single homeless men enabled men with alcohol addictions to participate in the creation and sustainability of an allotment and safe garden space.

The gardening project involved local residents, community groups and partners making a joint effort to change a place which was previously only used for drinking alcohol to an area for relaxation and horticulture - a haven where the men can sit and reflect, and grow their own food.

In addition, a number of initiatives including counselling, art therapy, meditation and relaxation, a RSPB wildlife watch and gardening have improved the men's mental health and wellbeing.

"The age range at the hostel is from 25-72 years and many talk about their past professions as skilled workers, master joiners, builders, musicians and artists to name a few."

"Involving them with the garden has helped the men's self esteem and believe in themselves and others."



# Bradbury Fields Tandem Group and Bradbury Walkers

## Bradbury Fields

Bradbury Tandem group held regular cycle rides, and the Bradbury Walkers provided weekly walks in the countryside using sighted volunteers to support visually impaired people.

This provided social opportunities for blind and partially sighted people as well as improving their physical health.



# Conclusion

The Natural Choices programme successfully engaged Liverpool residents from many different walks of life, in urban nature-based interventions, all of which were focused on the development of health and wellbeing in ways relevant to that community. The initiative was funded as a pilot programme and has given projects around the city the capacity to develop health and wellbeing in Liverpool residents, promoting a green infrastructure and a city which is focussed on good health and wellbeing for its residents. The success of the programme in improving wellbeing in many different groups, involving different types of interventions, highlights the transferability and adaptability to other populations and settings.

**“People and community coming together, fear being taken away of old prejudices on both sides”**

Project partners were invited to a discussion of the draft evaluation in April 2013. At that meeting there was considerable passion and commitment amongst the project partners to continue this approach and particularly to continue to work

collaboratively to do so. The core success factors were identified as the small, locally designed projects, being able to work flexibly with their own knowledge and assets and also collaboratively across a supportive network and with programme support, provided through The Mersey Forest and NHS.

There is considerable interest in linking to clinicians and General Practices. There is an acknowledgement that community organisations are significantly stretched for resources and that there has been a reduction in community provision in the last year. There is felt to be significant potential to harness the different assets of the groups and communities to form hubs across the city which would support an increase in the sustainability of the approach and a more consistent resource on which to draw for improved health outcomes.

**“I feel very proud of my work and others say they are proud of me”**

**“Laughter, friendship, compassion and companionship even in the most difficult of circumstances”**



**Blossom: Community Orchard, Everton Park**

Many thanks to all project photographers for the wonderful images in this document

## Contacts:-

The full report and electronic versions of this report are available at [www.merseyforest.org.uk](http://www.merseyforest.org.uk)

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