

Evaluation of Growing Together Westcliff and Shoeburyness Projects October 2017

Introduction

The Growing Together project was first established in Westcliff in 2000 by independent local charity Trust Links to address the mental health needs of local people living in Southend-on-Sea. This social and therapeutic gardening project was established to support the recovery and wellbeing of adults experiencing mental health problems, people with learning disabilities, and people living with other disabilities. The aim was to complement existing clinical services and help people in their recovery journey as they progressed to independence. Trust Links' vision is to provide nurturing and supportive environments to develop strong, resilient and healthy people and communities.

Since the flagship site in Westcliff opened in 2000, the Growing Together model has been replicated in Shoeburyness in 2012, Thundersley in 2015 and Rochford in 2016. This evaluation report focusses on measuring the impact of the Growing Together projects in Westcliff and Shoeburyness on adults with mental health problems and mild learning disabilities that have become beneficiaries of these projects.

This evaluation comprises: a summary of findings from a qualitative evaluation of the Growing Together Westcliff project conducted in 2014 by Dr Pauline Lane of the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education at Anglia Ruskin University; qualitative data and case studies obtained from one to one interviews with Growing Together members held in 2017; quantitative data on outcomes recorded and monitored by Trust Links; and feedback from professionals in other agencies that work with Growing Together. The evaluation ends with learning through the development of the projects, recommendations for the future and a summary of the key findings.



Growing Together members enjoy gardening and producing crops

Context

The Growing Together projects aim to support the recovery and wellbeing of people with mental health needs and learning disabilities and provide opportunities for people to build their skills, self-esteem, resilience, confidence and independence through participation in therapeutic community gardening activities and a range of other positive activities. Members typically attend 1 to 2 days per week to access therapeutic horticulture as well as a range of peer support and vocational activities including music, art, creative writing, yoga relaxation, cooking and crafts. Accredited vocational training is provided including a Diploma in Horticulture and work related qualifications. Trust Links also supports members to work towards employment through a Job Club and one to one employment support.

Mental health challenges are exacerbated by poverty, poor housing, complex family arrangements and social exclusion. Unemployment in Southend-on-Sea is higher than regionally or nationally (NOMIS, 2016) and unemployment is associated with an increased risk of mental health conditions. In August 2016 there were 7,530 people in Southend on ESA and Incapacity Benefits and 1,390 on JSA. The majority of these claimants are in the central wards of Southend (near Growing Together Westcliff) and in Shoeburyness.

The Mental Health Needs Assessment for Southend on Sea (Campion et al. 2015) identified a higher prevalence of mental health conditions than either regionally or nationally. 0.5% of people having a psychotic disorder in Southend-on-Sea, the highest in the East of England. Personality Disorder affects more than 6,000 people and eating disorders more than 8,000 people. The Needs Assessment also identified that the physical inactivity rate in Southend-on-Sea was higher than the East of England and national rate.

The Mental Health Needs Assessment for Southend-on-Sea (2015) highlights that the Southend-on-Sea Borough has a relatively high level of unmet public mental health need. Prevalance of common mental disorder (anxiety and depressive disorders) in Southend is 16.8%, higher than in the East of England (16%) or England as a whole (15.6%). The estimated proportion of the adult population with a psychotic disorder in Southend-on-Sea (0.5%) was the highest in the East of England (0.35%) and higher than England (0.4%).

Adults with mental health problems and mild learning disabilities have been at the heart of the development of the Growing Together projects from their outset. They have been involved in the design of the community gardens including what should be grown where and in aspects of the build process. Beneficiaries are called 'members' as it is their project and they are key contributors to it - it is their garden and project. Regular 'Member Meetings' are held and chaired by members (with staff present) to discuss issues, plans, ideas and rules. In this way, there is a collaborative management process for the projects and members are in the lead on the delivery and development of the projects. Members are given responsibility in the running of the

project including planning and designing activities, team leading activities and tasks, planning trips and discussing developments.



In 2014, Trust Links and South Essex Partnership Trust (SEPT) NHS Mental Health Trust commissioned an evaluation of the Growing Together project in Westcliff. The evaluation was carried out by Dr Pauline Lane of Anglia Ruskin University to assess the Growing Together project as a therapeutic intervention for people with mental health problems from the perspective of members. This evaluation used a qualitative methodology, comprising in-depth interviews with members (8n) and project staff (4n), two focus groups with members (9n) and secondary analysis.

Lane identified that the project has many benefits for service users including: improving quality of life; improving levels of physical activity; develops knowledge and skills in horticulture; improving experience of social inclusion and social interaction, creating a sense of community; offering training and qualifications that have the potential to improve employment prospects; supporting mental health and wellbeing; and impacting the wider community by sustaining individuals and transferring skills and knowledge into the wider community. Recommendations were also made as part of the findings and the Women's Group at Growing Together Shoeburyness was started as a result of the evaluation's findings.



Members were proud to be awarded the Level 1 Diploma in Horticulture at Growing Together Westcliff

Evaluation Methodology

In addition to a summary of Lane's evaluation in 2014, this evaluation comprises one to one interviews with members and review and analysis of quantitative data collected and monitored by Trust Links, specifically the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) and the Growing Together Outcome Measure. Trust Links have recently invested in a new cloud based database, Charitylog, which has the capability of recording member responses to both of these outcome measures and producing reports on 'distance travelled' between the first (baseline) and subsequent assessments. The evaluation includes feedback from external agencies collected through a Surveymonkey questionnaire.

Outcome measures used in this evaluation:

The Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) is a shortened version of the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale. SWEMWBS has been validated for the measurement of mental wellbeing among people aged 13 to 74 in the UK and comprises 7 positively worded statements with five response categories from 'none of the time' to 'all of the time'. It measures both mental and emotional wellbeing (how 'good' somebody feels) and psychological functioning (how well somebody thinks they are functioning).

Mental well-being is now largely accepted as covering two perspectives: (1) the subjective experience of happiness (affect) and life satisfaction (the hedonic perspective); and (2) positive psychological functioning, good relationships with others and self-realisation (the eudemonic perspective). The latter includes capacity for self-

development, positive relations with others, autonomy, self-acceptance and competence. SWEMWBS covers most, but not all, attributes of mental wellbeing including both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives (Stewart-Brown and Janohamed, 2008).

Mental wellbeing and Mental Health are different terms. Mental Wellbeing describes positive states of being, thinking, behaving and feeling, whilst Mental Health is a term often used to incorporate a range of states from excellent mental health to severe mental health problems. It is worth noting that mental wellbeing is often used interchangeably with the term 'positive mental health' and sometimes 'wellbeing' (Putz et al., 2012).

SWEMWBS aims to measure mental wellbeing itself, and not the determinants of mental wellbeing, which include resilience, skills in relationships, conflict management and problem solving, as well as socioeconomic factors such as poverty, domestic violence, bullying, unemployment, stigma, racism and other forms of social exclusion.

Growing Together Outcome Measures is a self-reported questionnaire comprising of 7 positively worded statements with five response categories ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. The statements aim to subjectively measure the perception of how the Growing Together project has impacted upon members' lives across key indicator areas including physical health and fitness, social inclusion, skills development, progression towards employment and dependence on support from individuals and services. This outcome measurement tool was introduced as a result of the findings from the 2014 evaluation by Anglia Ruskin University and aims to quantify the outcomes that this study identified.

The **Recovery Star** is used within Growing Together primarily as a motivational and engaging tool for holding structured discussions with members about their wellbeing. Data from the Recovery Star is collated on the Charitylog database. Lane's (2014) evaluation stated that the Recovery Star is less useful as a way of measuring and aggregating improvements in wellbeing across the project, and did not consider the Recovery Star to be a useful tool to generate performance data. Recovery Star data is not used or analysed within this evaluation, nor was it analysed as part of the 2014 evaluation by Dr Lane. This is because when seeking ethical approval from the SEPT Research Governance Group in 2014, they were clear that they did not trust the validity of the tool as a measure of recovery because there were often many external mitigating circumstances that impacted on the lives of members (such as problems with welfare benefits).

Qualitative Data

Qualitative research is concerned with meaning and how people experience and make sense of the world. As an approach, it can help 'give a voice' to those who are often unheard and it can offer an insight into people's experiences. The methods used in the evaluation process were a combination of semi-structured and unstructured interviews with members. These interviews provided an opportunity for people who were part of the Growing Together project to share their experiences and perspectives. An interview guide was used to explore key themes but the length and depth of the

interview was varied to suit the needs and interests of the different members and unstructured interviews were also used as a result of these needs.

In both the Lane (2014) report and data collected for this updated report, qualitative data was transcribed and analysed as a collective to identify any key themes arising from members' perspectives. The data was analysed through open coding; identifying, naming, categorising and describing phenomena found in the data collected. The analysis used a thematic approach, looking for broad or common themes and variations. Some interviews with members were also summarised into Case Studies within the results/findings section of this evaluation.

How data was collected:

SWEMWBS data is routinely collected as part of the Growing Together assessment and review process. When an individual first becomes a member of the project, they are asked to reflect on their thoughts and feelings in the past two weeks. This provides the baseline SWEMWBS data. The SWEMWBS form is then completed again with members within a member review with their keyworker, providing the follow up assessment at around 6 months into attending the project. The Growing Together Outcome form is completed by members during keyworking and/or member reviews at the Growing Together projects.

All members are asked to read, understand and sign an information consent form which includes information about the project and how the information they provide will be stored and used for evaluation purposes. All members are assured that their responses will remain anonymous when the project effects are reported and that the forms they complete are kept securely and confidentially, in line with Trust Links information governance policies and procedures.

Scoring and Analysis:

The SWEMWBS scale is scored by summing the response to each item with a minimum total scale score of 7 and a maximum of 35. The responses from each of the sample group was collated and analysed. This 'raw' data proved sufficient to assess change in wellbeing for individual members, as a 'before' and 'after' score. The data was also more rigorously analysed to compare to the national average by transforming each individuals 'raw' score according to a conversion table. The SWEMWBS is a shortened version of the WEMWBS which is Rasch compatible. This means the seven items included have undergone a more rigorous test for internal consistency than the 14 item scale and have superior scaling properties. The seven items relate more to functioning than to feeling and therefore offer a slightly different perspective on mental wellbeing. The main advantage of the 7 item scale is that it is shorter and it can be transformed so that it can be used as an interval scale for psychometric analysis. Scores are transformed according to the conversion table from the RASCH compatibility study, which facilitates the use of parametric statistical analysis (Rasch model is a psychometric model for analysing categorical data, such as questionnaire responses, as a function of the trade-off between (a) the respondent's abilities, attitudes or personality traits and (b) the item difficulty) (Warwick, 2017).

Informed Consent for Interview Process:

Within both this evaluation process and the Lane (2014) evaluation, verbal consent to participate and use data was granted by participants and recorded on a voice recorder. Interviews were recorded on a voice recorder and consent to record the conversation was also granted as part of the interview process. During the interviews, the interviewer(s) frequently 'checked in' with participants to ensure that they were happy to continue talking about their experiences, and it was made clear to all participants that they had the right to withdraw from the evaluation process at any point up to the publication of the final evaluation report. All interviews were recorded and transcribed ready for analysis and the voice recordings were deleted following transcription to ensure confidentiality.

Limitations:

Trust Links implemented the new Charitylog database and went live in April 2017. Prior to the use of this data management service, member data was largely held in paper-based files and as such an automatic electronic data migration was not able to be completed. All client records were entered manually onto the new system with a primary focus on transferring members' personal data. There has been an ongoing process of inputting historic data including SWEMWBS baseline data on to client records. Any member reviews that have taken place since the launch of the new database have been recorded on the new system. However, there remains a number of existing members that had their baseline assessment completed prior to the implementation of Charitylog, and have not yet had their baseline SWEMWBS data entered onto the system. As a result of this, only member records that contained both the baseline assessment and at least one follow up assessment were included in this evaluation. This totalled 30 individual members, which equates to 17% of the total members attending the Growing Together projects in Westcliff or Shoeburyness. Although this number cannot be considered a statistically representative sample of the total population (of Growing Together members), the sample used does represent a diverse cross-section of the overall member population and the results give a good indication of the impact that the Growing Together project has had on the mental wellbeing of its members.

Feedback from Other Agencies

In addition to client data, Trust Links have sought feedback from people working in other agencies in and around South East Essex on their views of the Growing Together projects. A questionnaire was sent via email using the SurveyMonkey tool and of the 30 that were requested, 10 responded within one week.

Evaluation Findings

There are currently 177 members accessing the Growing Together projects at Westcliff and Shoeburyness. (For overall analysis purposes, members who attend both projects have only been counted once.) 76 members are female and 101 male, giving a 43% female to 57% male split.

The age range of members demonstrates a diverse total population, as shown in the pie chart below - the split between age groups is quite evenly spread, with 91% of the total members falling within the 22-64 age brackets.

Figure 1: Age range of members attending Growing Together Westcliff and Shoeburyness Projects.

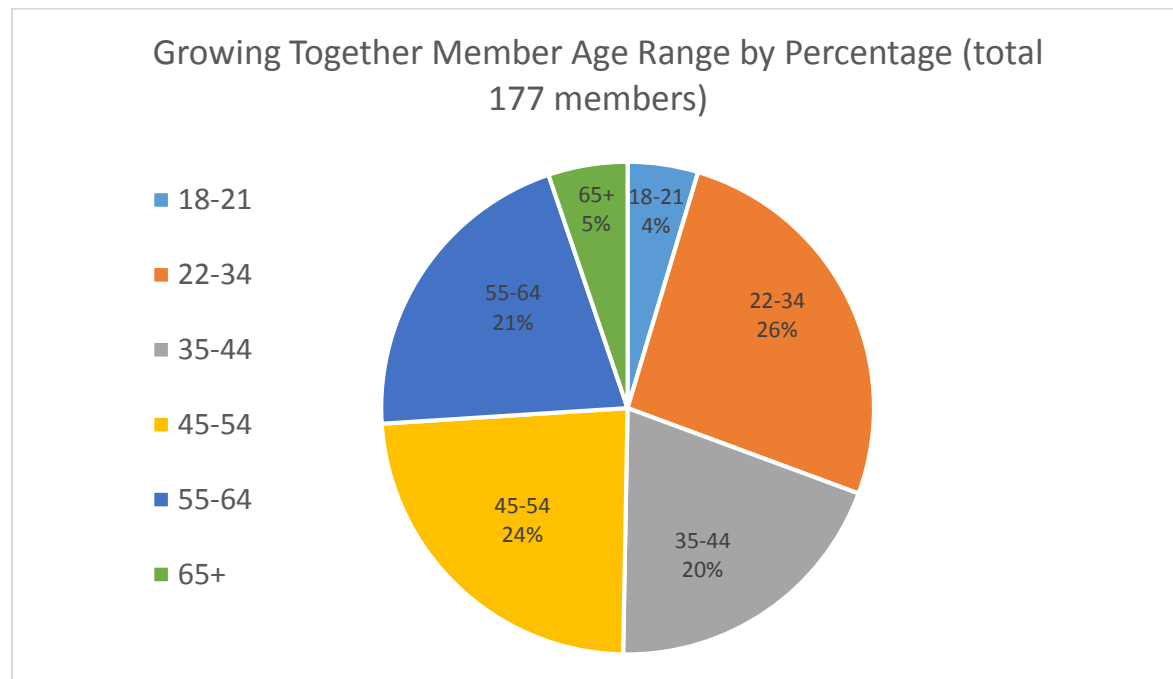


Figure 2: Main disability of Growing Together Members, by percentage.

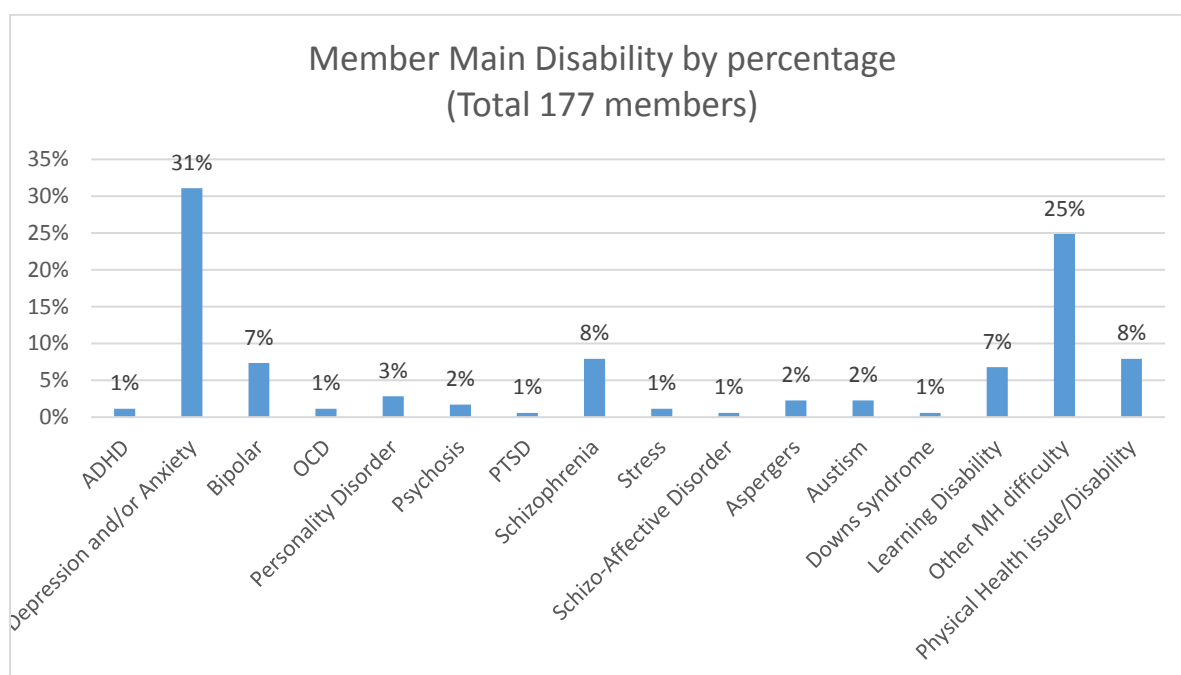
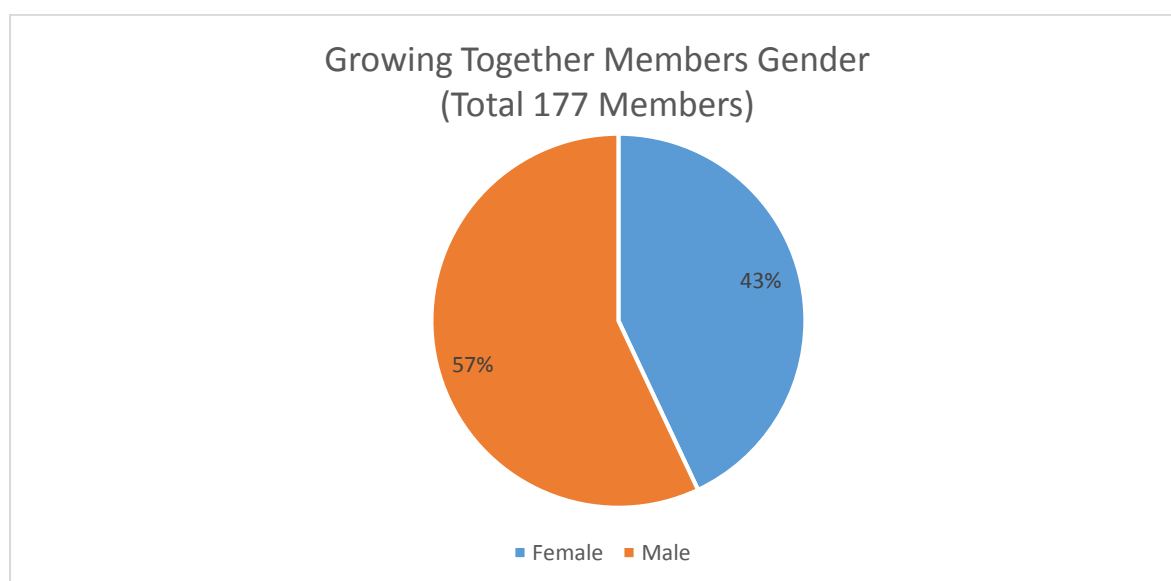


Figure 3: Gender of Growing Together members



As previously stated, the total number of members with baseline and follow up SWEMWBS assessments, used within this evaluation was 30. Although the sample size represents 16% of the total number of members, and thus cannot be considered statistically representative of the total population, the demographic of the sample captures a cross section with a demographic similar to the overall population (in terms of gender ratio, age range, and mental health diagnosis).

Although a larger sample of the population is required to conclusively demonstrate the impact of the Growing Together Project on the Mental Wellbeing of its members, the data demonstrated below can be seen as indicative of the total population, and the impact that the project has upon their wellbeing.

Figure 4: SWEMWBS respondents Age range by percentage

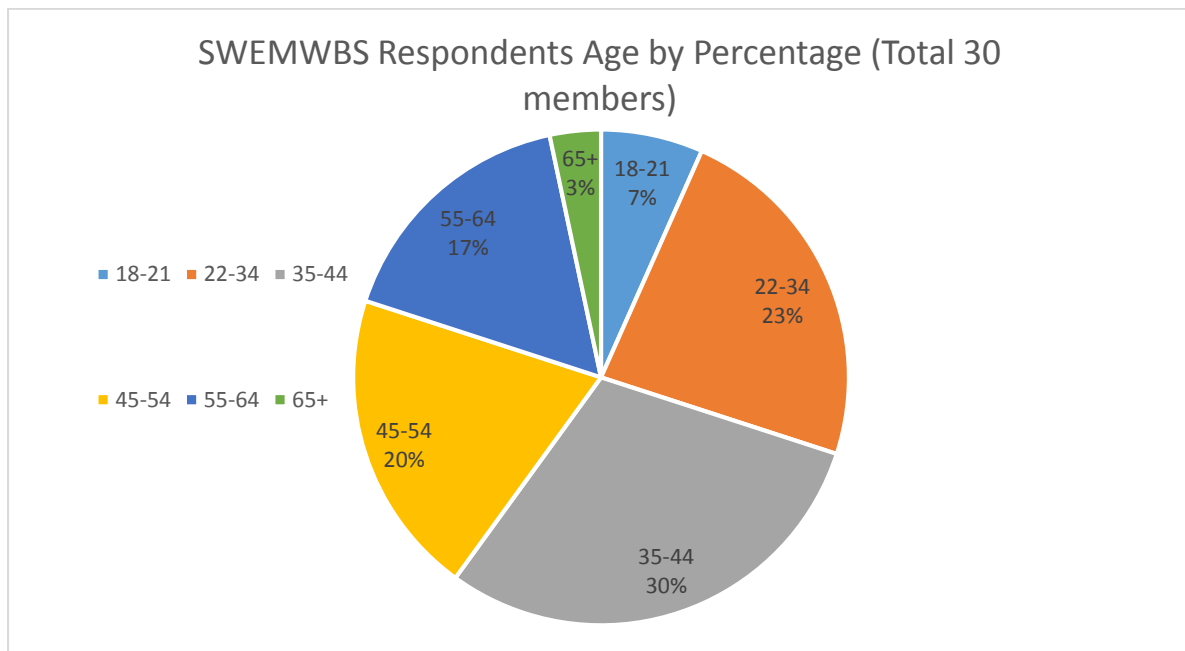


Figure 5: SWEMWBS Respondents Main disability by percentage

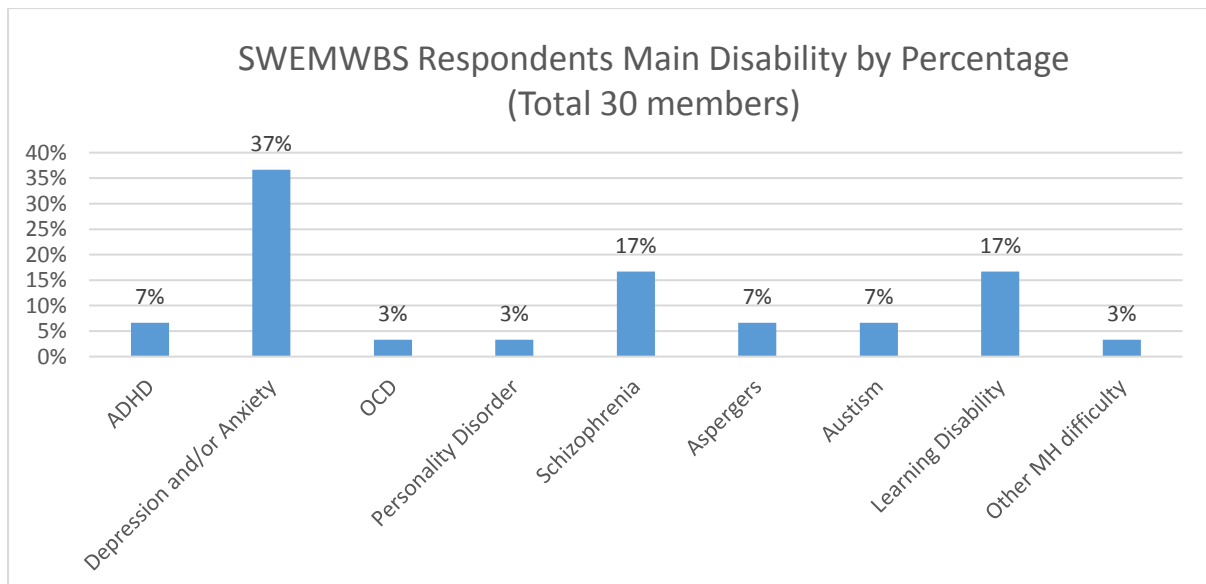
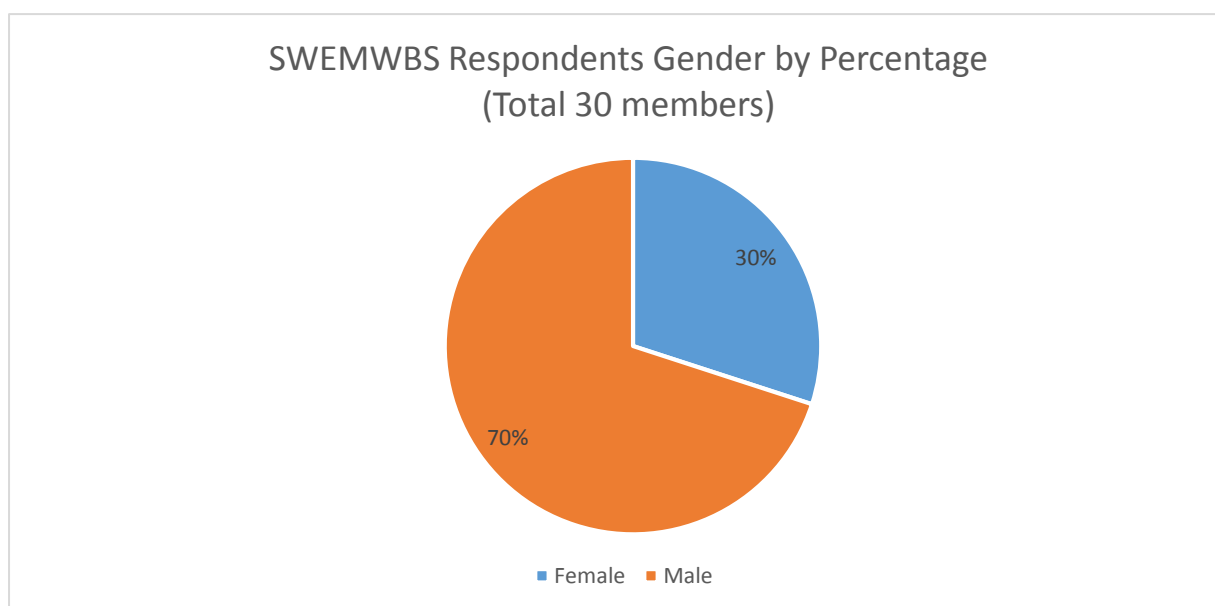


Figure 6. SWEMWBS Respondents by Gender (Percentage)



The following tables show the 'Before' Scores and 'After' for each member, including their total 'Raw' scores and the 'Transformed' scores (along horizontal axis). The tables also show the Total 'Raw' scores for each SWEMWBS statement, the average score for each statement, and also the total average score on the bottom right of the table.

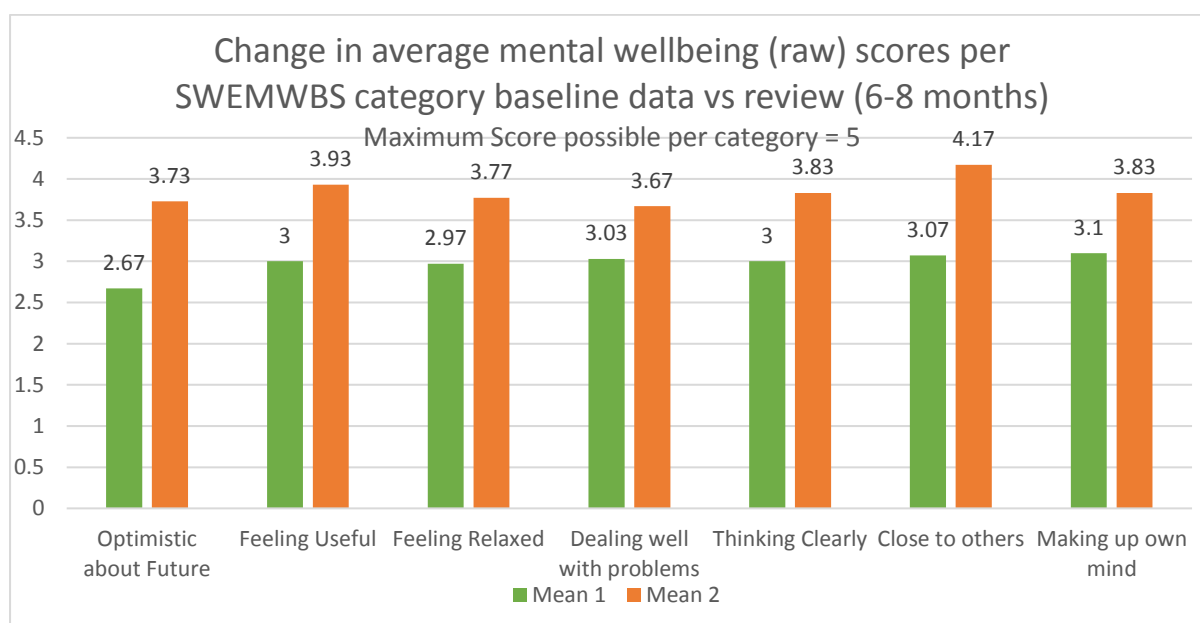
Figure 7. SWEMWBS responses 'Before' scores

Member Before																																	Total	Mean
Member	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	(Raw)	Mean		
Optimistic about Future	3	2	2	2	3	4	2	4	3	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	2	1	3	1	1	1	1	3	3	3	4	2	4	3	80	2.667		
Feeling Useful	4	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	3	2	3	3	4	2	3	2	1	4	4	2	4	3	3	3	90	3		
Feeling Relaxed	3	3	1	5	3	3	2	4	2	3	4	2	5	4	3	2	3	4	3	1	2	2	1	4	4	3	4	1	5	3	89	2.967		
Dealing well with problems	3	2	1	4	3	4	2	4	3	3	3	4	2	5	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	1	4	4	3	4	3	4	3	91	3.033		
Thinking Clearly	3	3	2	4	3	5	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	4	4	4	4	2	4	3	90	3		
Close to others	3	2	2	3	2	5	2	5	3	2	3	2	4	4	3	2	3	3	3	3	1	3	3	3	4	4	4	3	4	4	92	3.067		
Making up own mind	5	3	2	3	2	5	2	3	3	3	3	3	5	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	2	2	3	5	3	4	4	2	3	4	93	3.1		
Raw score	24	18	13	23	19	29	16	26	20	20	23	18	31	24	21	18	20	20	22	14	12	13	11	27	26	23	28	16	27	23	625	20.83		
Transformed score	21.54	17.43	14.75	20.73	17.98	26.02	16.36	23.21	18.59	18.59	20.73	17.43	28.13	21.54	19.25	17.43	18.59	18.59	19.98	15.32	14.08	14.75	13.33	24.11	23.21	20.73	25.03	16.36	24.11	20.73	588.63	19.62		

Figure 8. SWEMWBS responses 'After' scores.

	Member After																														Total	
Member	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	(Raw)	Mean
Optimistic about Future	4	3	4	3	3	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	3	5	4	3	3	4	2	3	2	3	4	5	3	5	3	5	3	112	3.733
Feeling Useful	5	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	5	4	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	3	3	3	2	5	4	2	5	4	5	3	118	3.933
Feeling Relaxed	5	4	3	5	3	4	5	5	3	4	5	3	5	2	5	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	2	5	4	3	4	2	5	3	113	3.767
Dealing well with problems	3	4	3	5	3	4	3	5	5	4	5	3	5	4	4	3	5	4	3	3	2	2	4	3	3	2	4	4	5	3	110	3.667
Thinking Clearly	4	5	5	4	2	4	3	5	3	4	5	4	5	4	3	4	4	3	4	4	2	3	2	5	5	3	5	3	5	3	115	3.833
Close to others	5	5	4	4	3	5	4	4	4	3	5	3	4	4	3	4	5	4	5	4	3	4	4	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	125	4.167
Making up own mind	4	5	4	3	2	5	4	2	5	3	5	4	5	4	4	4	3	4	4	2	3	4	5	2	3	4	5	4	5	4	115	3.833
Raw Score	30	30	27	27	19	31	27	29	28	25	35	25	34	26	29	27	28	26	28	21	19	21	22	29	29	21	33	24	35	23	808	26.93
Transformed Score	27.03	27.03	24.11	24.11	17.98	28.13	24.11	26.02	25.03	22.35	35.00	22.35	32.55	23.21	26.02	24.11	25.03	23.21	25.03	19.25	17.98	19.25	19.98	26.02	26.02	19.25	30.70	21.54	35.00	20.73	738.13	24.5

Figure 9. Change in total average mental wellbeing 'Raw' scores



The above graph shows the increase in average wellbeing for the 'before' and 'after' scores (mean 1 and mean 2). Each statement/measure of wellbeing demonstrated an increase from the 'before' and 'after' assessment and the greatest change occurred in members feeling 'Optimistic about the Future' (39.7% increase), 'Useful' (31% increase) and 'Close to Others' (35.83% increase). (See figure 10 below.)

Figure 10. Percentage increase of Mental Wellbeing from Before to After scores, per SWEMWBS statement.

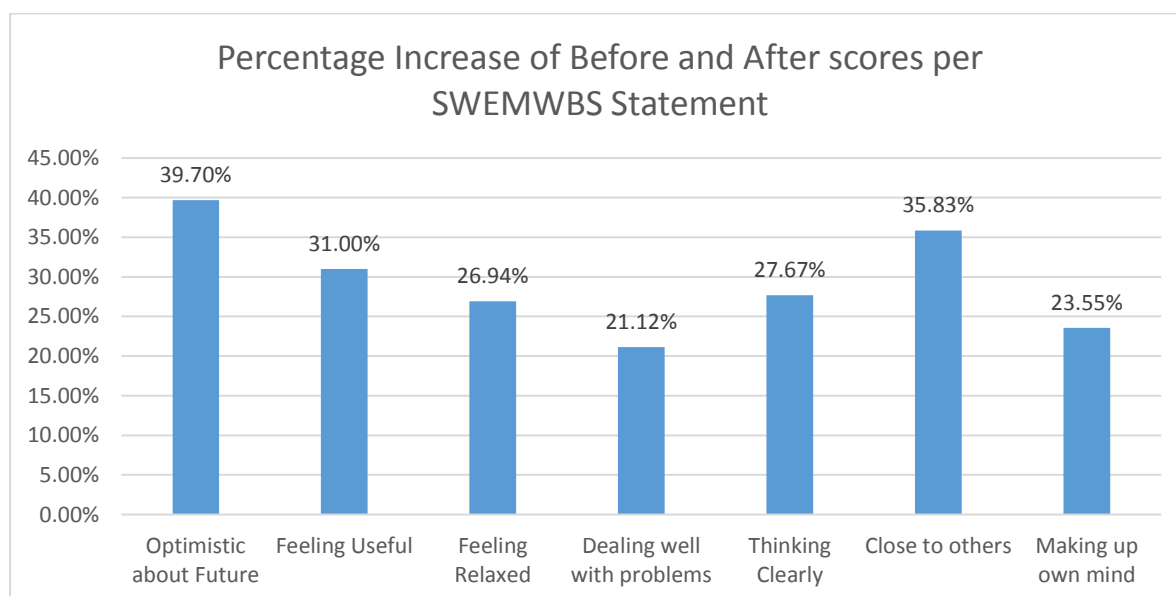
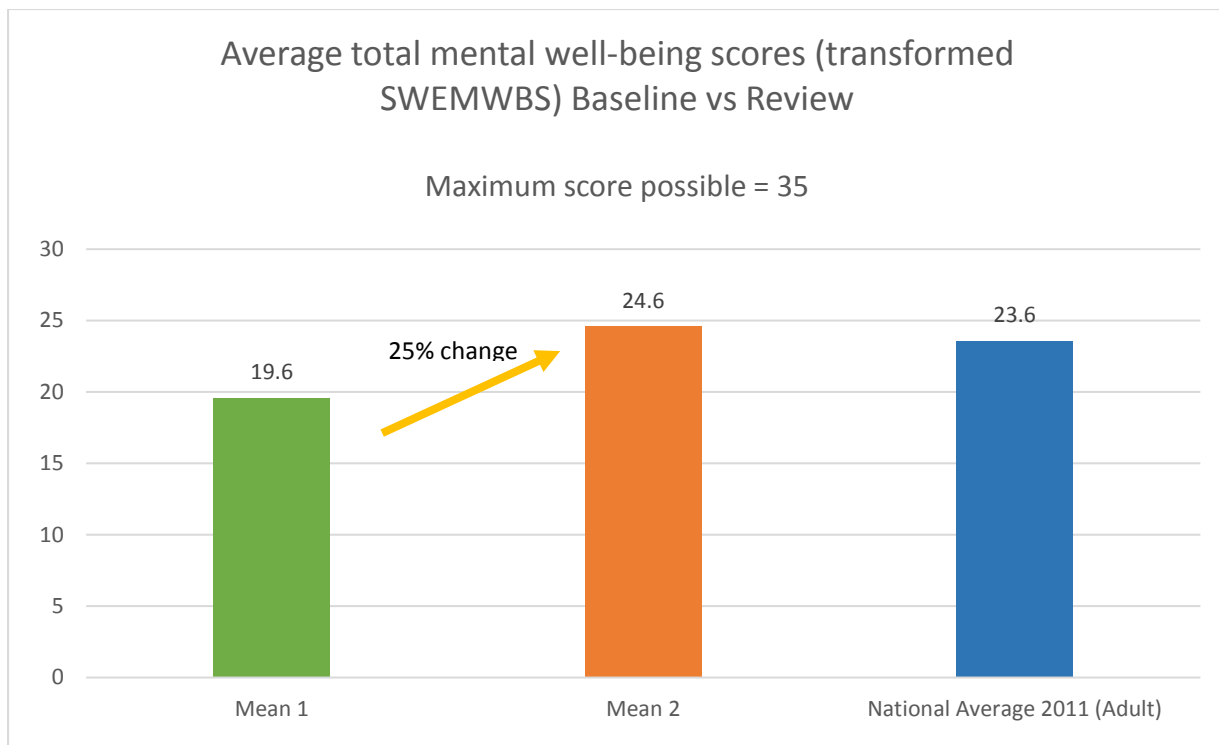


Figure 11. Average total mental well-being scores (Transformed), for 'Before' and 'After' assessments



The sample of 30 members ‘before’ and ‘after’ scores (completed within 6-8 months of attending the Growing Together Project) demonstrated a 25% increase in wellbeing from an average score of 19.6 to an average score of 24.6, taking the 2nd mean (‘after’ score) above the National Average for Adults in England as reported in the Health Survey for England 2011.

Key Findings of the 2014 Anglia Ruskin Evaluation of the Growing Together Project:

Dr Pauline Lane’s 2014 qualitative evaluation of Growing Together found that the Growing Together project can clearly be defined as offering Social Therapeutic Horticulture to their local community according to Joe Sempik’s definition (2007; 2008). The key features of Sempik’s definition of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture are: therapeutic intent and practice, location specific, working with nature, democracy and involvement, social coherence and community, production, and routine and attendance.

Working with Nature:

- There is a clear sense of a shared vision (of creating a productive garden and flourishing plants) and this is an important element of community cohesion
“Being part of something is important but being valued is the real thing that matters... yeah, being seen as a valuable member of the community”
- Working with and in nature does have intrinsic value to members (and staff) but the significance of this relationship varied between individual members

“You know it is so nice to take something from seed to table and I have done it... It would be easier to go to Tesco and buy a carrot but for me, it is like nurturing something and it is a sense of achievement and you can actually see the result at the end of the season and you know that you did that”

- The process of nurturing a garden as well as nurturing each other, seems to be at the heart of the ethos of the project

“People look out for each other. People listen to each other and look out for each other”

- Important elements of the project included co-creating a garden and coming together to learn new skills through nature and the value of working with the seasons was seen as positive to members

“I think it is creative and I think working with nature and learning to understand it, it is really rewarding.” “I have never has a certificate for anything. I was not good at school. Yeah I feel proud that I did it and now I want to do some more. I have done the NVQ in Horticulture. It was good. I had not done any learning for years it gave me more confidence and my family noticed it at home, you know.”

- Overall the members felt that working with and in nature was good for their mental health and physical activity also seemed to support people’s mental and physical wellbeing.

“There is something about working in a group on the same thing and sharing the same pleasure as the garden grows”.

- The process of gardening allowed people freedom of movement and again this was valued by members as they could choose gardening tasks according to their needs and they also had the freedom to move around the garden.

“It is nice to work with others but I do like the quiet. I find gardening relaxing. There is something about being in nature that makes me feel good at the end of the day”.

“With all the different areas here it really works as people can find a job that needs to be done and find something that they need to be done. With peoples different abilities it works well”

The Growing Together Community:

- Many of the members live alone, or have spent years living in institutions, and therefore the community life and a sense of belonging were highly valued by members

“I think it is the sense of community in this place. I think that is at the core. You have a supportive network around you. I know where I used to live I felt quite isolated really and with depression, living without community does not help, on your own you are inwardly focussed”

- Peer support was highly valued by all of the members and staff. The community is seen as very accepting and supportive and the process of being part of something offers people an opportunity to meet new people. For many people with long term mental health problems there are few opportunities to meet others.

“It’s like a big family. You would be surprised: people say things to each other that they would not say to a doctor or psychiatrist, because when we talk to each other you are talking to someone who has been through the same things as you. You know there has never been a raised voice here. I think we are all like a family, if you get annoyed with someone you can tell someone else. You know we do actually care about each other.”

- The project builds a trusting relationship between staff, members and volunteers and it might be suggested that this is a prerequisite for therapeutic change. As part of this process, the keyworker system seemed to be valued by members.

“I think that they people that work here help to make it happen. Everyone has respect for each other. People have the space to be who they are. Because of everything here, there is a nurturing environment and that sort of helps you move on. They help me sort out practical things like my accommodation....”

- It was clear when talking to members that the Growing Together project has cultivated an ethos of being accepting and non-judgemental and this was also highly valued.

“Everyone has respect for each other and I find everyone here very supportive, I like the way that people share things about what happened to them, even today, I was chatting to someone about what happened to them and I was able to tell them what I did in the same situation.”

- There are a number of member-led initiatives that impart a sense of ownership for the participants; this also helps with the transitions from the project into more independent living.
“I think it is important to support members to make their own decisions about the tasks they want to do, because often, for people who have been ill for a long time, all their decisions are made for them”.

- External links with the wider community helped to build up pride in the Growing Together project and open days were valued as it gave the community something to work towards

“This ‘journey’ to restore and revive the land is important to the project, as people who have attended the project have been part of the improvements and the struggles that have been experienced over the years. This relationship with the land and each other has created a strong sense of community achievement and satisfaction. They have collectively overcome adversity to create a special and unique project”.

- The shared meal (Lunch) and social events (open days/outings) were frequently identified as very important parts of belonging to this community and for some people, it was the only hot meal they would have in the day.

“Eating together is really important, everyone has time to sit together and no-one feels left out”

- The project seems to strengthen individuals by increasing emotional and social resilience by promoting self-esteem and developing life and coping skills. Several members spoke about how their relationships with their families had improved since being part of the Growing Together project as they were now able to talk about their feelings and have different ways to find support. *“Yeah I think that being with other people has helped me, I guess I was a bit hot-headed sometimes... (pause..) but talking about things here has helped things.. you know, with me mum back home”.*

The 2014 evaluation also states that ‘The Growing Together project offers an alternative response to mental distress and recognises the influence of social and cultural factors on Mental Health Outcomes. Its emphasis on personal experiences and relationships helps to build the social capital of its members. The project helps to build social capital through formal and informal training. This supports employability and helps to build confidence and competence and it offers members hope and the anticipation of a different future”.

The 2017 one to one interviews conducted with existing members as part of this evaluation identified the following themes that reinforced the findings from the 2014 evaluation:

- The Growing Together project provides a strong sense of community and belonging to a community
- The Growing Together project provides opportunity for building confidence, coping mechanisms and emotional and social resilience, through attendance at the project and participation at groups/course including Anxiety Management, Mindfulness and Job Club

- Members benefit from having a named keyworker, finding it reassuring to have someone to talk to, but also agreed that they felt comfortable speaking to any member of staff about difficulties they are facing
- Members feel a sense of ownership over the project, and enjoy the freedom to decide what jobs they would like to do and to help shape what is done at the project
- Members feel that there is a strong sense of peer support, and the Growing Together project provides a non-judgemental, nurturing environment.
- The Growing Together project supports and facilitates skill development and routes to entering or re-entering volunteering, education and employment.
- Members feel that attending the Growing Together project, and the relationships they have gained from attending, have positively impacted their mental wellbeing.



Growing Together Westcliff members working together

“Both my keyworker and the Mental Health Practitioner have been so great at helping me to talk to my employer and deal with other problems I’ve been facing, it’s so reassuring knowing that I wasn’t alone and had the support from Growing Together staff and other members.”

“I have been signed off from my psychiatrist now because of all the good progress I’ve made. I still do get anxious from time to time but by coming here (Growing Together) I have learned ways of how to deal with it. I have done an anxiety management course and that’s taught me some really good ways of

coping. I've also done a health and hygiene course, health and safety and a mindfulness course"

"My confidence in social situations has grown massively"

"I have completed the NVQ in horticulture and have gained employment as a result of the skills I have gained here"

Case Studies

The following case studies came as a result of the 2017 one to one interviews with members:

Case study: J started at Growing Together with high levels of anxiety, social isolation and low confidence. Through attending the project he has gradually built his confidence up, making friends and trying new things. He is currently completing the Level 1 Diploma in Horticulture and is looking to become a self employed gardener. His mother recently wrote a short testimony to share what she has observed about his change in behaviour over the last year since attending the project: "Thank you so much to the team at Trust Links. My son has truly been 'set free' – he has found a value within himself that has enabled him to flourish and grow. He has a beautiful glow about him now, not only from the sunshine having been agoraphobic for many years, but a 'glow' that he now spreads to others."

Case Study 2: G started at Growing Together after being hospitalised in a mental health unit due to a 'mental breakdown' and crippling anxiety to the point that she could not even leave her home. G had been hospitalised for 2 months and referred herself to Growing Together after being given a leaflet by her social worker. G was working at a school prior to her breakdown and had been on sick leave since being hospitalised. G described how on her first day at Growing Together she received a call from her employer and was too anxious and panicked to answer the phone. Her keyworker encouraged her to answer and spoke on G's behalf and, with G's permission, explained the current situation to her employer and advocated on her behalf. G's keyworker helped keep communication open with her employer throughout her time at Growing Together and G met with her employment advisor at Growing Together during the job club, which she stated was helpful as she met in a familiar, supportive environment where she felt safe and less anxious, making it easier for her to get back to work quicker. G mostly enjoyed being in the kitchen and preparing the lunch for other members best, but also got involved with gardening tasks and working in the on-site shop. She stated 'I have always enjoyed cooking anyway but I just love being part of the team here and working in the kitchen'. She has attended courses at Growing Together including anxiety management and feels that these courses, alongside the environment in which they took place, have helped her to better manage her anxiety and return to work on her full hours after a phased return.

"I'm managing so much better now and that's largely down to the support I've had since I started here. I have started back at work on a phased return and will be going back to my full 20 hours next week. My keyworker has been so supportive and really

took the pressure off of me, breaking things down so I could focus and think clearly about achieving small steps, rather than panicking about the bigger picture”

G was one of the respondents of the SWEMWBS sample, and her SWEMWBS ‘before’ and ‘after’ scores demonstrated and validated the qualitative data that she provided in her one to one interview.

Figure 12: Case Study 2 ‘G’ SWEMWBS scores (before and after) ‘Web’

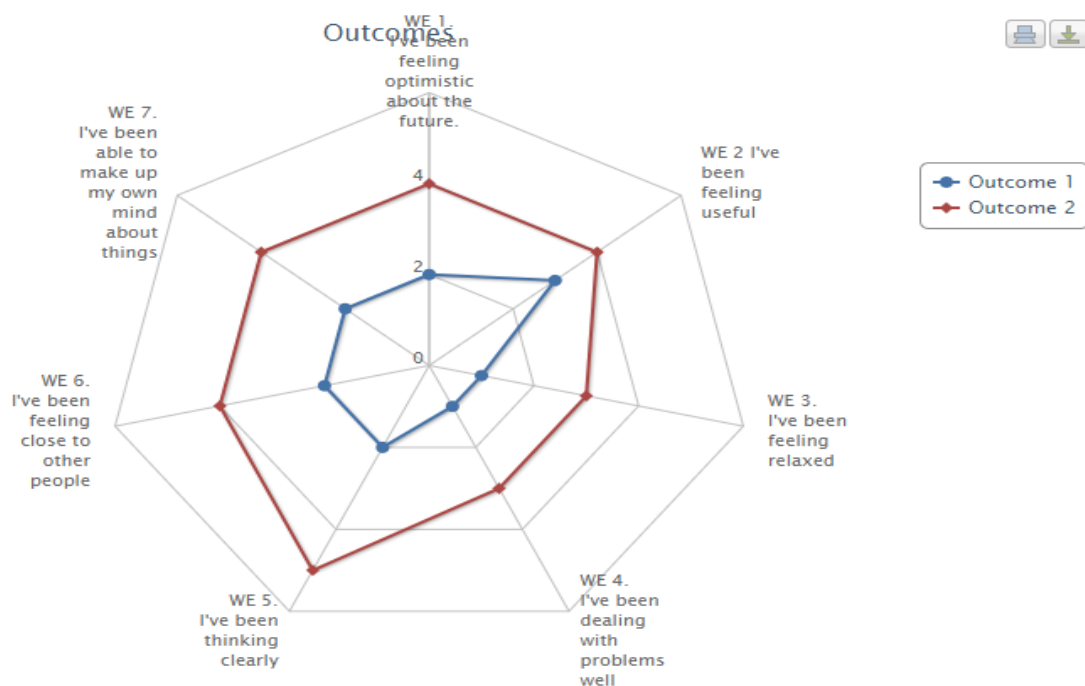
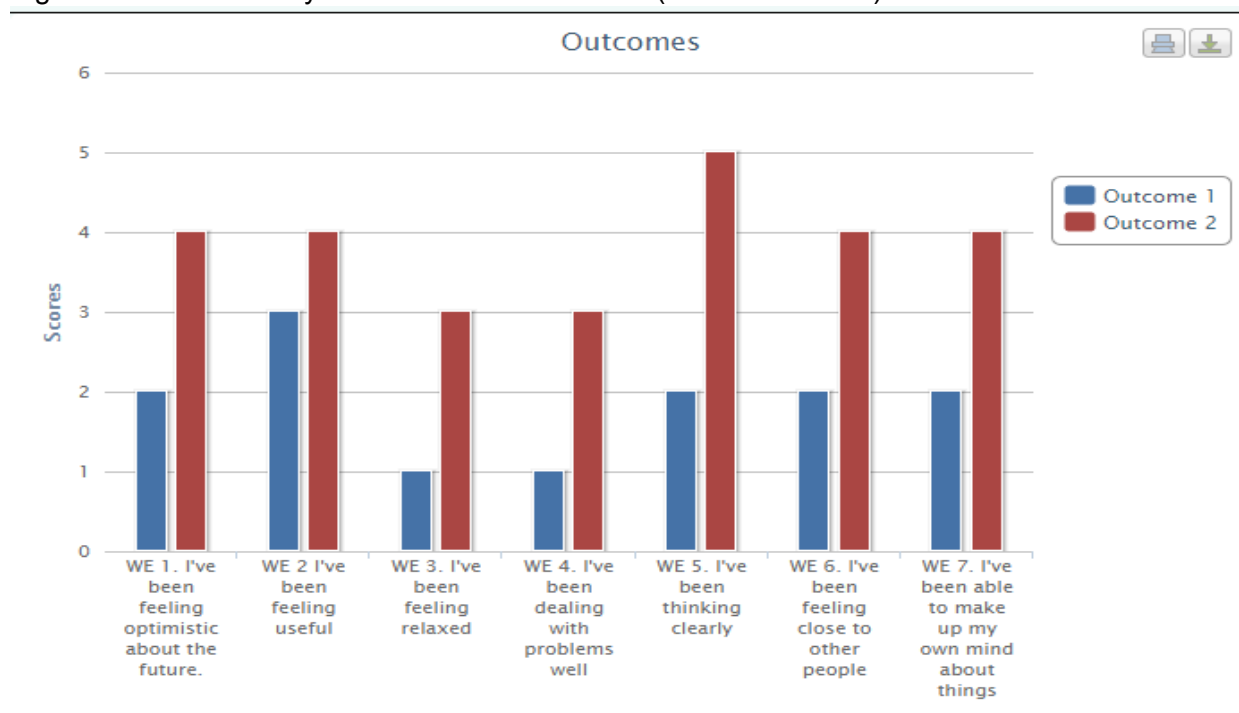


Figure 13: Case Study 2 ‘G’ SWEMWBS scores (before and after)



Outcomes:

The 2014 Anglia Ruskin University evaluation found it difficult to talk about outcome measures from their evaluation as it is a qualitative study and no baseline data was available for members at the time the evaluation was carried out. However, the evaluation did state with confidence that from the members' perspective, Growing Together does:

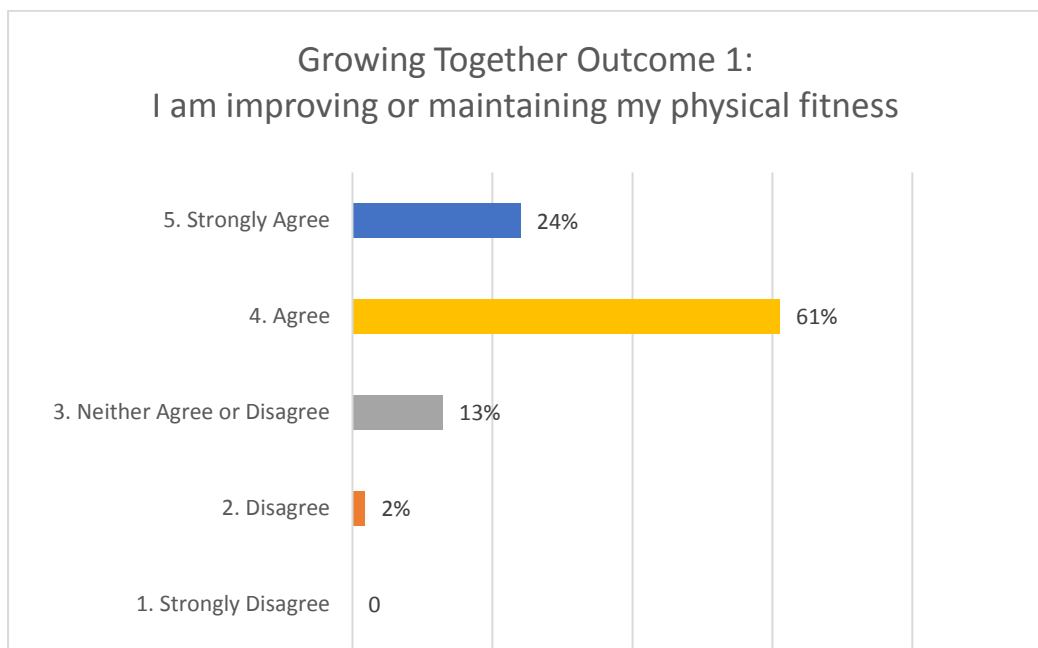
- Improve their quality of life
- Improve their level of physical activity/fitness
- Improve their knowledge and skills
- Improve their experience of social inclusion and social interaction and creates a sense of community
- Offer Autonomy, choice and control in project activities
- Offer training and qualifications that have the potential to improve employment prospects
- Support members health and wellbeing
- Has an impact on the wider community by sustaining individuals and by transferring skills and knowledge into the wider community

Following this evaluation the Growing Together Outcomes form was introduced to quantifiably measure the outcomes that were identified. The Growing Together Outcome monitoring form does not rely on 'before' and 'after' scores, and measures members perspective and perception of how the Growing Together Project has impacted on their lives, measured on a likert scale from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. In total 54 responses were analysed from data held on Charitylog with the following results:

Figure 14. Growing Together Outcome Measures Overall Table

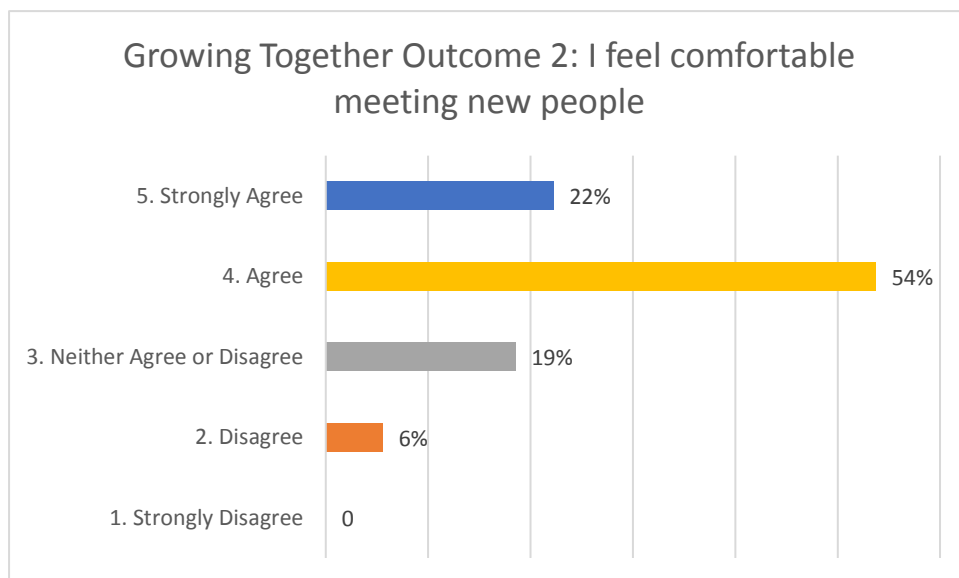
	GT 1. I am improving or maintaining my physical fitness		GT 2. I feel comfortable meeting new people		GT 3. I am learning new skills		GT 4. I have meaningful structure to my week		GT 5. I feel part of a community		GT 6. I consider myself progressing towards paid employment of supported volunteering		GT 7. I feel less dependent on support from other people or services	
	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
1. Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3.70%	2	3.70%
2. Disagree	1	1.85%	3	5.55%	1	1.85%	1	1.85%	2	3.70%	5	9.26%	5	9.26%
3. Neither Agree or Disagree	7	12.96%	10	18.51%	3	5.55%	6	11.11%	5	9.25%	16	29.62%	12	22.22%
4. Agree	33	61.11%	29	53.70%	29	53.70%	32	59.25%	28	51.85%	29	53.70%	30	55.55%
5. Strongly Agree	13	24.07%	12	22.22%	21	38.88%	15	27.77%	19	35.18%	2	3.70%	5	9.25%
Total Agree or Strongly Agree	46	85%	41	76%	50	93%	47	87%	47	87%	31	57%	35	65%

Figure 15. Growing Together Outcome 1: Physical Fitness



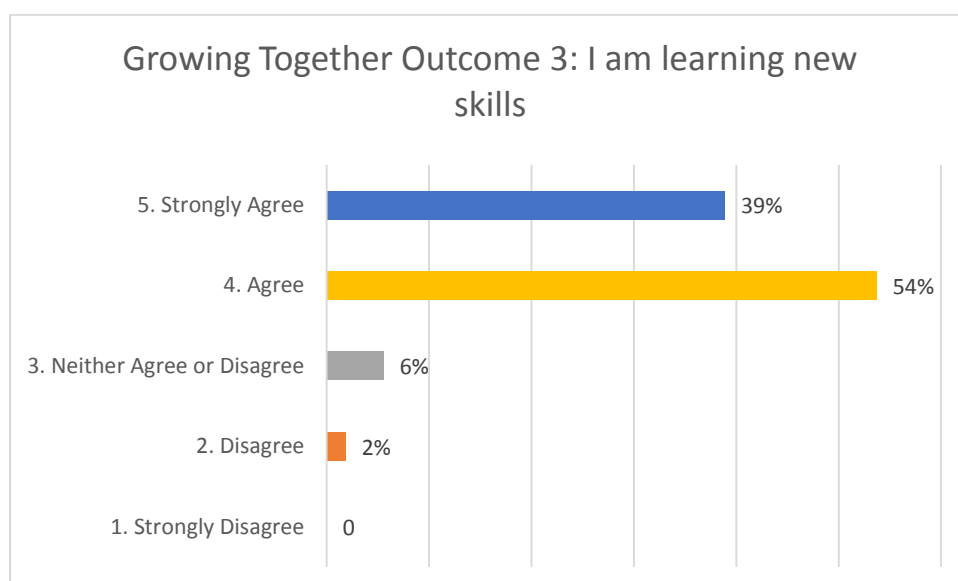
As shown in the above graph (figure 15), a total of 85% of members (46 out of 54) either Agreed, or Strongly Agreed that they were improving or maintaining their physical fitness. 13% (7 members) neither agreed or disagreed and 2% (1 member) disagreed.

Figure 16. Growing Together Outcome 2: I feel comfortable meeting new people



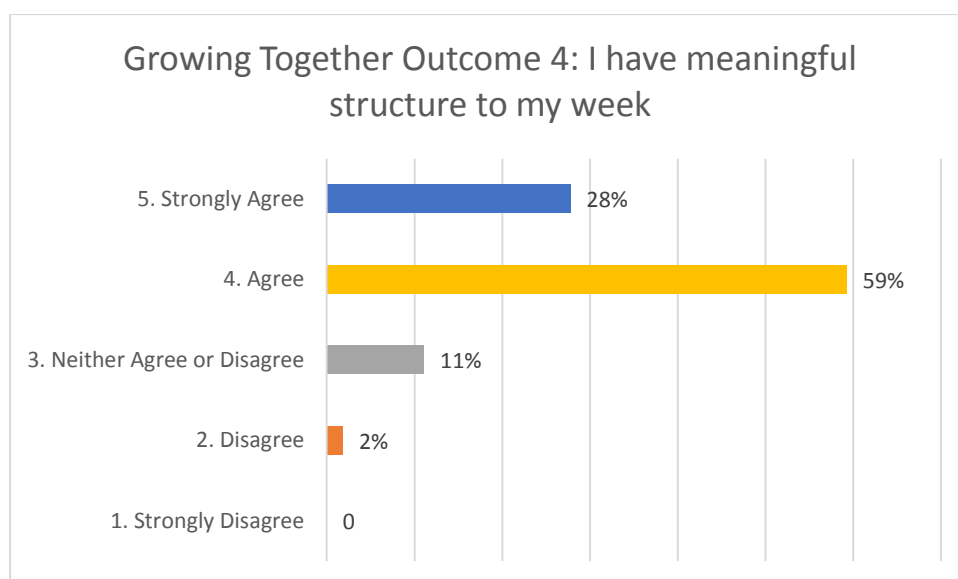
76% of members (41 individuals) 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that they felt comfortable in meeting new people. 19% (10 members) 'neither agreed or disagreed' and 6% (3 members) 'disagreed' with the statement.

Figure 17: Growing Together Outcome 3: I am Learning New Skills



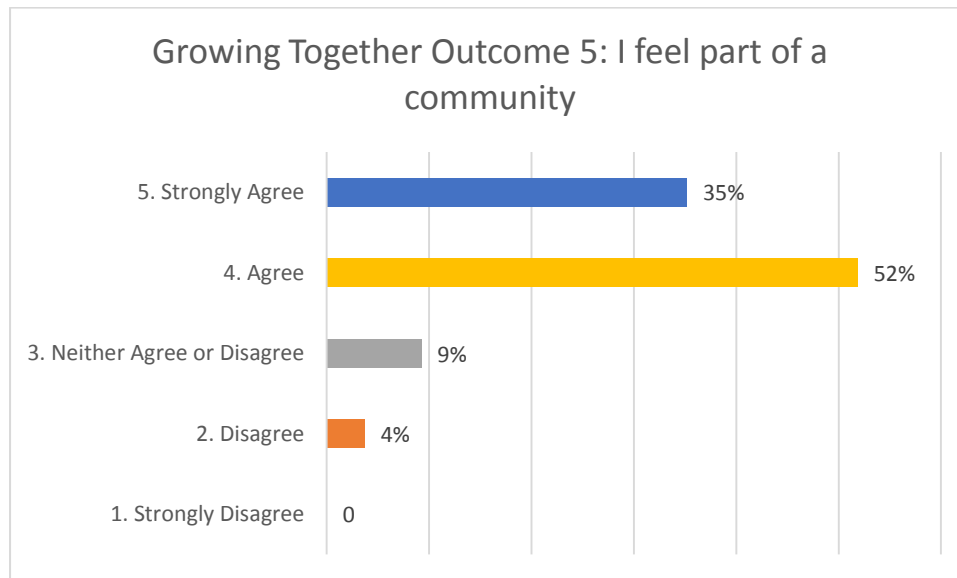
93% of members (50 individuals) 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that they were learning new skills. 6% (3 members) 'neither agreed or disagreed' and only 2% (1 member) 'disagreed' with the statement.

Figure 18: Growing Together Outcome 4: I have meaningful structure to my week



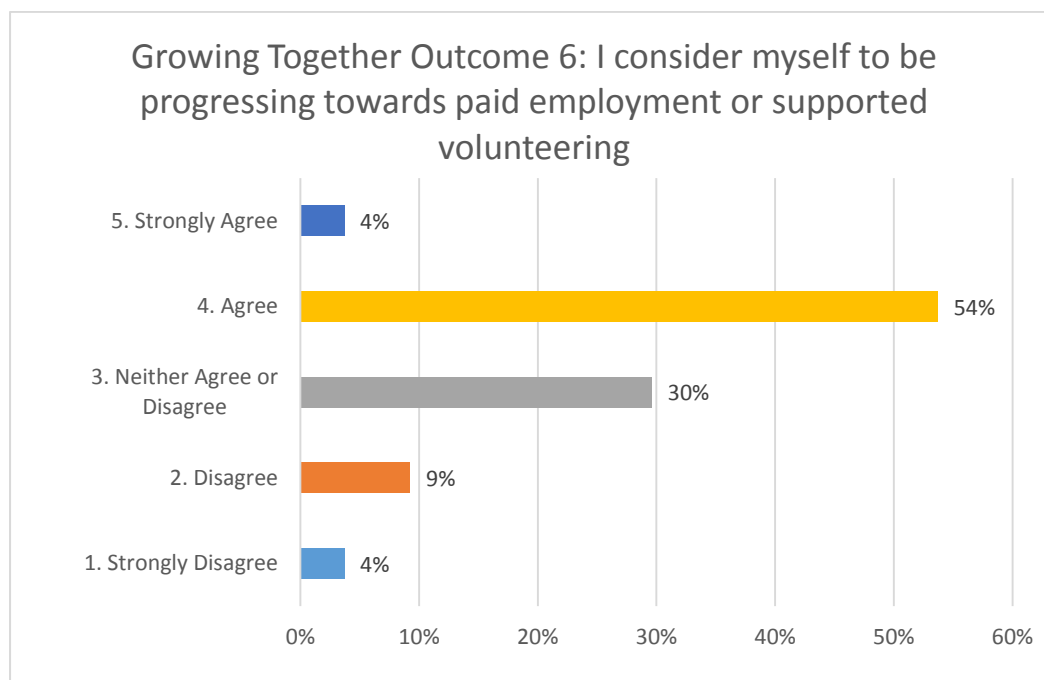
87% of members (47 individuals) 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that they had meaningful structure to their week. 11% (6 members) 'neither agreed or disagreed' and only 2% (1 member) 'disagreed' with the statement.

Figure 19. Growing Together Outcome 5: I feel part of a community



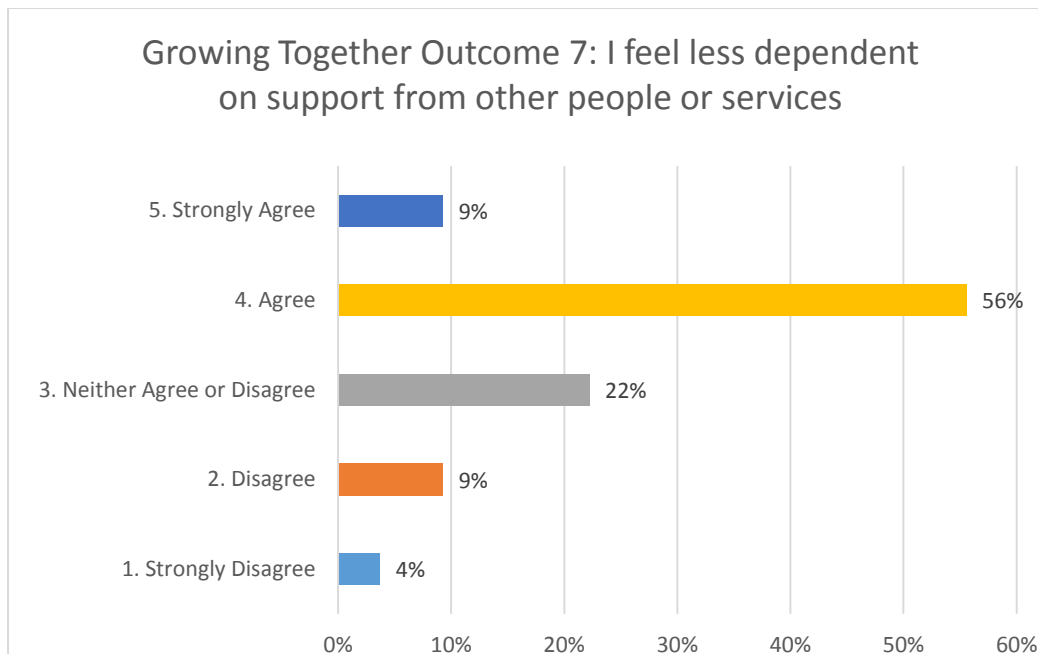
87% of members (47 individuals) 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that they feel part of a community at Growing Together. 9% (5 members) 'neither agreed or disagreed' and 4% (2 members) 'disagreed' with the statement.

Figure 20: Growing Together Outcome 6:



58% of members (31 individuals) 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that they considered themselves to be progressing towards employment or volunteering through Growing Together. 30% (16 members) 'neither agreed or disagreed'. 13% (7 members) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement

Figure 21: Growing Together Outcome 7: I feel less dependent on support from other people or services



65% of members (35 individuals) 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that felt less dependent on support from other people or services. 22% (12 members) 'neither agreed or disagreed'. 13% (7 members) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement

Each of the 7 Growing Together Outcomes had mainly positive outcomes with the majority of members asked either strongly agreeing or agreeing to the statements. The strongest agreed with outcomes were:

- I am improving or maintaining my physical fitness (85% agree)
- I am learning new skills (93% agree)
- I have meaningful structure to my week (87% agree)
- I feel part of a community (87% agree)



The annual May Fayre at Growing Together Westcliff brings the community together

Feedback from Other Agencies

As an addition to the data analysed from members within this evaluation, a survey was also sent to individuals from local organisations and charities including Department of Work and Pensions, Jobcentre Plus, Southend Borough Council, Essex Partnership NHS Trust, Southend Association of Voluntary Services (SAVS), Rethink Mental Illness, Healthy Life Essex CIC, Southend Citizens Advice Bureau and Ace Lifestyle Southend CIC.

The questions posed in this survey aimed to establish an overview from other organisations as to how Trust Links is viewed and the perception of the impact that the project has on its members from the perspective of other professionals and organisations locally.

The survey comprised 8 questions, 5 of which were scalable using a likert type scale and 3 required a worded answer. The questions were as follows:

1. What is your full name (Text answer)
2. Please tell us which organisation you work for (Text Answer)
3. Have you referred individuals to Growing Together before, or worked with any clients that are members of Growing Together (Yes/No response)
4. Overall, how would you rate the quality of the service and support that Growing Together provides to individuals with mental health issues? (Likert Scale answer – Poor, Fair, Average, Good, Excellent)
5. From your knowledge of services in Southend and the needs of local people, how important do you feel the need for the Growing Together Project is? (Likert Scale

answer- Not Important, Slightly Important, Moderately Important, Very Important, Extremely Important)

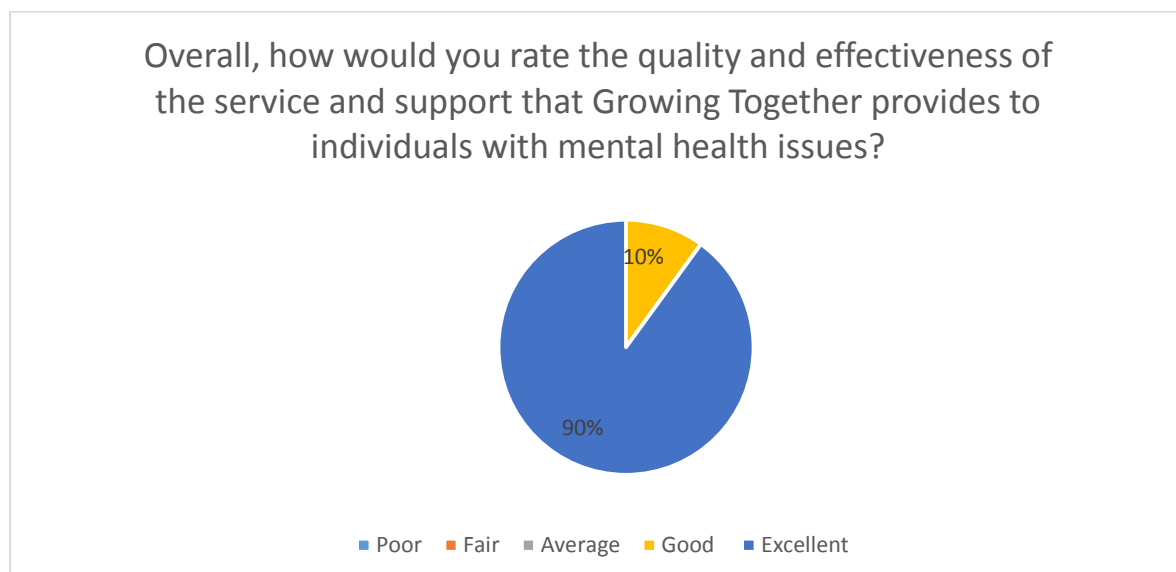
6. How likely is it that you would recommend Growing Together, or refer clients that you work with to Growing Together to support their mental health needs? (Likert scale answer – Not Likely at all, Not very likely, Somewhat Likely, Very Likely)
7. In your experience, or from what you have seen from the experience of clients/others, do you feel that attending Growing Together has a positive impact on members in any of the following areas? Please tick all/any that apply
(Social Inclusion, Mental Wellbeing, Skills Development, Providing Meaningful Structure/Routine, Progression towards Volunteering, Education and/or Employment, Physical Fitness, Confidence, Self-Esteem, Other (please state))
8. Have you got any other comments about Growing Together?

Results of Survey:

In total, 10 individuals responded to the survey, with a 100% completion rate of all question. Question 1 and 2 were used to identify which individual/organisation had responded for recording purposes but will not be used for analysis purposes.

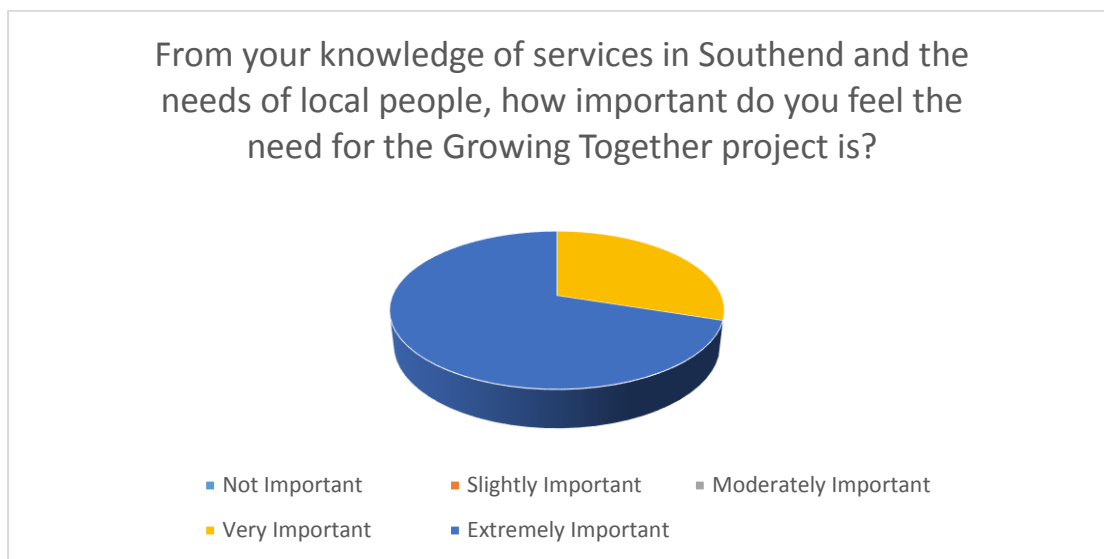
100% answered 'Yes' to Q3, confirming that they had referred individuals to the Growing Together project before and/or worked with clients that had been members of Growing Together.

Figure 22: Organisation Survey Q4.



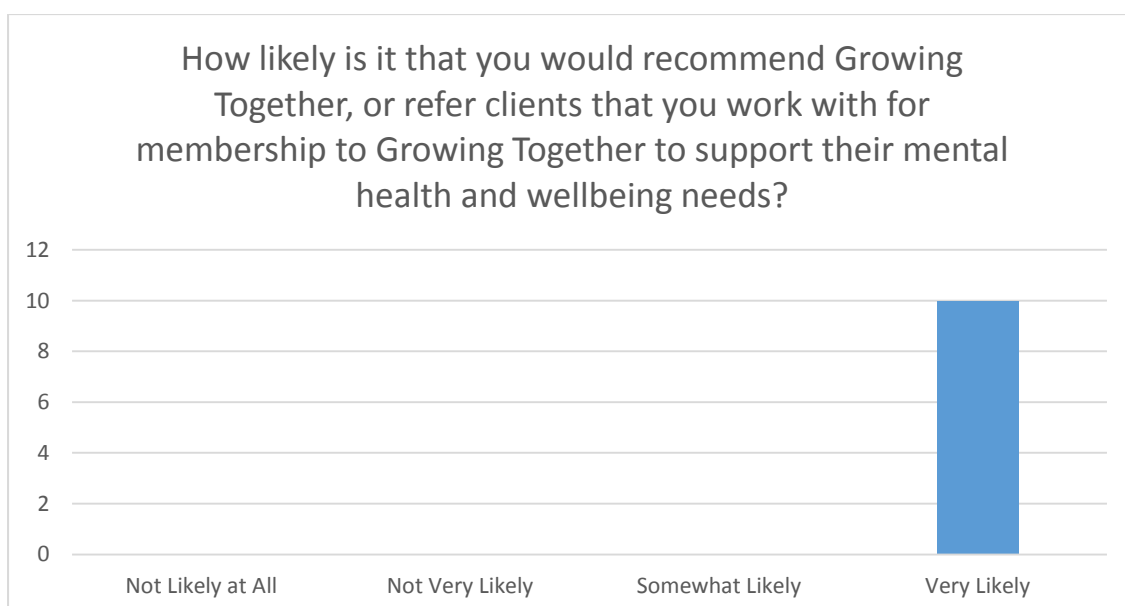
Of the 10 respondents to the survey 90% rated the quality and effectiveness of service and support that the Growing Together project offers to members as 'Excellent', and 10% rated it as 'Good'.

Figure 23. Organisation Survey Q5.



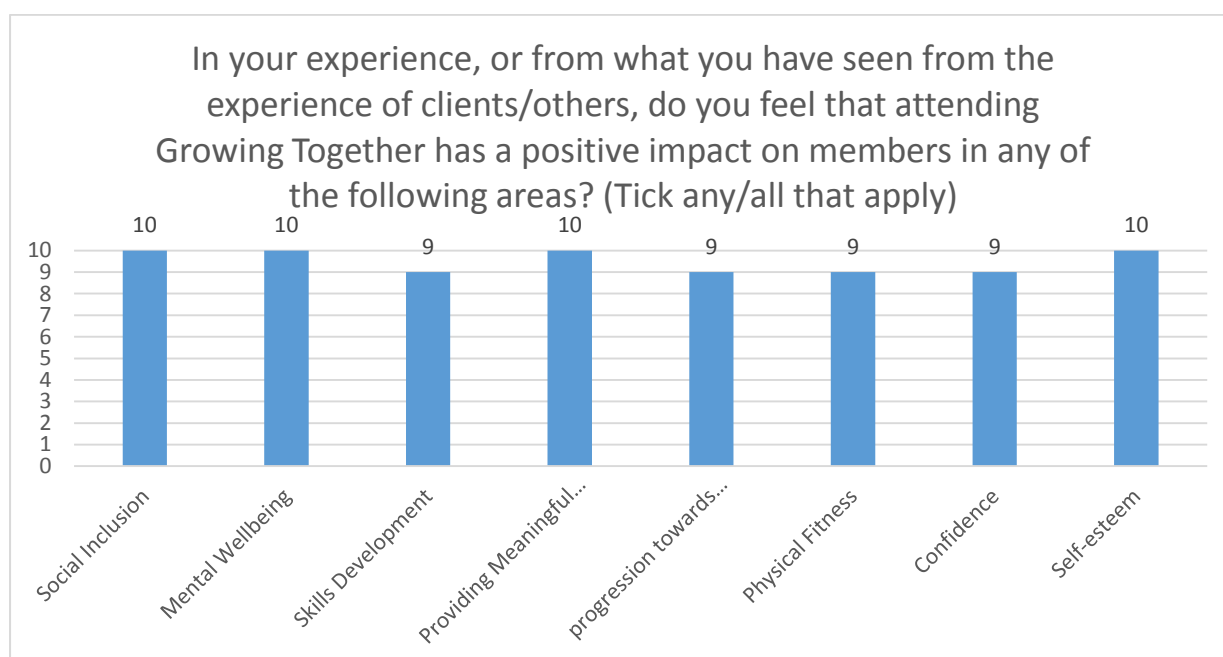
Of the 10 respondents, 70% rated the importance of the Growing Together Project to be 'Extremely Important' for the needs of local people, and 30% rated it to be 'Very important'.

Figure 24. Organisation Survey Q6.



100% of respondents stated that it was 'Very Likely' that they would recommend Growing Together or refer clients for membership at the Growing Together project in order to support their mental health and wellbeing needs.

Figure 25. Organisation Survey Q7.



Of 10 respondents, 100% agreed that they felt that Growing Together had had a positive impact on members in the following areas: Social Inclusion, Mental Wellbeing, Providing Meaningful Structure/Routine and Self-Esteem. 90% of respondents felt that Growing Together had a positive impact on: Progression towards Volunteering, Education and/or Employment, Physical Fitness, Skills Development and Confidence.

3 respondents ticked the 'Other' box and stated that Growing Together also had a positive impact on 'Environmental Awareness', 'Enjoying Being Outdoors' and 'Carers Support'.

Question 8; Have you got any other comments about Growing Together? Yielded the following responses:

"The changes I have seen in individuals are amazing. On a visit to one of the sites a client informed me 'If it wasn't for this place I would be in prison now or more likely I would not be here at all' she told me all about the first qualification she had ever got was with Growing Together."

"An amazing place that brings the community together. When one site was getting broken into and vandalised the director looked at positive ways of including young people in the area and very soon the site stopped having people break in or destroying things. This had given the young people an area where they were accepted and they were proud of the things they were doing there."

"Growing together is a great way of supporting people facing mental health issues. I like the practical approach and being people centred."

"You can see the difference this project makes to people's lives. It also provides an excellent support network for people."

“Great project that works in a person centred way with their members. A much needed project in our community.”

“I feel Growing Together is a unique project in the area. Not only does the project provide excellent outcomes for its members, but the collaborative approach with other local agencies aids social cohesion.”

This service is a key part of the local community support network for people in the area, it works with lots of local organisations, company's, charities and careers to support people with mental health, learning and physical disabilities, it covers a wide range of support.

Wellbeing Outcomes

This evaluation aimed to measure the impact that the Growing Together Project has on the wellbeing of members using varied measurements of ‘Wellbeing’ including the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS), Growing Together Outcome Measures and structured one to one interviews with members.

Wellbeing is a widely used term and there is currently no universally accepted definition. There has, however, been increasing discourse, measurement and action on well-being in policy and practice over recent years, as well as a growing body of academic research in the field. This has helped move the agenda forward and created a much greater understanding of wellbeing, both in terms of what it is and the conditions necessary for it to emerge.

As cited in the Abdallah et al. (2008) report, in 2006, the UK Government cross-departmental Whitehall Well-Being Working Group sought to develop a ‘shared understanding’ of well-being. Well-being, it states, is:

*“a **positive physical, social and mental state**; it is not just the absence of pain, discomfort and incapacity. It requires that **basic needs are met**, that individuals have a **sense of purpose**, that they feel **able to achieve important personal goals and participate in society**. It is enhanced by conditions that include **supportive personal relationships, strong and inclusive communities, good health, financial and personal security, rewarding occupation, and a healthy attractive environment**”*

The findings of this evaluation overall have demonstrated that the Growing Together project does positively impact the wellbeing of members, in accordance with above definition of Wellbeing, and through other measures of the conditions and factors that influence the wellbeing of individuals. These contributing factors of wellbeing have been measured and demonstrated through the use of the validated SWEMWBS scale, Growing Together Outcome Measures and one to one interviews with members.



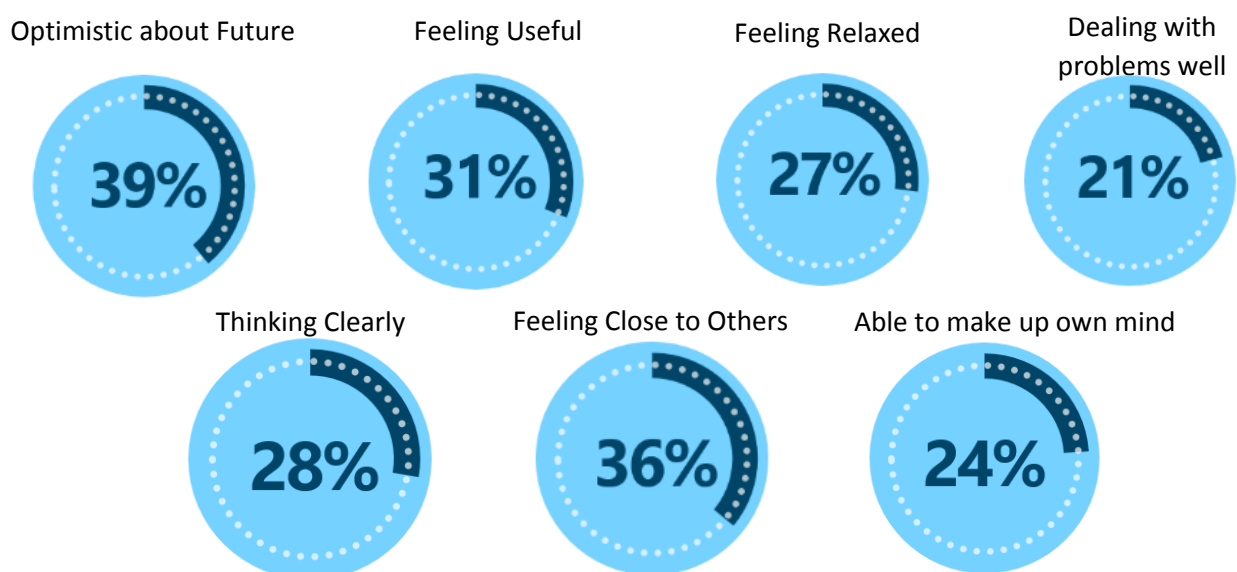
SWEMWBS

The findings of this evaluation demonstrate that the overall average wellbeing of members improved by **25%**. The total average points difference between before and after scores was **5** points (19.6 to 24.6- transformed scores). While it is impossible to be precise about how much change in SWEMWBS is considered 'meaningful', best estimates range from **3 to 8** points difference between 'before' and 'after' time points.

The SWEMWBS scale demonstrated a positive change for each of the 7 outcomes measured, all of which relate to and effect the overall wellbeing of an individual. The overall positive percentage change of members' wellbeing is demonstrated in the diagram below.

From this data it can be concluded that the Growing Together project does positively impact members' overall wellbeing; with the greatest changes to the group wellbeing deriving from members feeling more optimistic about the future, feeling useful and having a purpose, feeling close to others, and thinking clearly.

Figure 26: Group Change in Wellbeing for each SWEMWBS statement.



Growing Together Outcome Measures:

The Growing Together Outcome Measures assesses other indicators and factors that contribute to the overall wellbeing of individuals, and measures how the Growing Together project is impacting their wellbeing based on these factors. Each statement/outcome produced positive results, demonstrating that Growing Together project has produced overwhelming positive results in each of these outcome areas and had a positive impact on the lives of members and their wellbeing.

Figure 29: Growing Together Outcome Measures: Percentage of Members that Agree or Strongly Agree to each statement.



Member Involvement in the Project

Both Growing Together Westcliff and Shoeburyness have included members in the design, development and delivery of the projects. Members have been involved from conception to design of each aspect of the gardens and the Growing Together Manager, who is a garden designer, has met with members each time there has been a new development at the project to ensure their views have been taken into account. Members have identified the sorts of things that they would like to be delivered at the project and in many cases they help to run the project for other members. For example, the art, music and creative writing groups at Growing Together Westcliff are all run by members and volunteers and members led the bid for funding for a yoga relaxation tutor at Growing Together Shoeburyness.

Both Growing Together projects have regular Member Meetings, which are chaired and run by members themselves. Through these meetings members discuss their ideas and suggestions with each other and with project staff including developments

in the gardens, courses, trips and upcoming events. This user-led forum enables the voices of members to be heard and the chair and other members represent those that are not confident to talk in the meeting.

Members are involved in the evaluation of Growing Together through regular reviews, feedback in a suggestions book and through participation in the outcome tools. Case studies and videos also highlight the impact of the project in a more tangible way and enable members to tell their stories.

Return on Investment

In total it costs nearly £200,000 per year to run the two Growing Together projects per year. This equates to less than £1,130 per member per year or the equivalent of £21.73 per member per week (with some members attending one or two days per week). This is significantly cheaper than most 'day services' for mental health and Learning Disabilities, which generally charge £50 or more per day. Growing Together represents excellent value for money when considering the reduced demand on secondary mental health services (which cost £50m per year in South East Essex) and the benefits of adults with mental health problems progressing into employment and off state benefits. For example, preventing a client requiring mental health hospitalisation saves the NHS £459 per bed day (New Economy, 2015) so if Growing Together prevents one adult with mental health problems from attending an inpatient unit for one year and two months, it would save the entire cost of the projects for one year.



The Job Club provides opportunities for members to research employment options

Learning from the Projects

There has been a huge amount of learning in the development and delivery of the Growing Together projects in Westcliff and Shoeburyness over the last 17 years and 5 years respectively. Robust systems, processes and structures have been built to manage a diverse range of members, many of whom have complex needs and challenges. Clear rules and boundaries have been put in place to ensure everybody on the project, including members, staff and volunteers, are safe and their wellbeing is safeguarded.

When establishing the Growing Together Shoeburyness project in 2012/13, it was initially challenging to engage members of the community in the project. It took time to build awareness, trust and confidence with people in the local area for them to progress to become members of the project. The site also suffered vandalism on a few occasions from local young people. Trust Links identified the need to engage with the local community in other ways and has established a youth project and worked with the local primary school, secondary school and children's centre to provide sessions for children and young people at the garden, which has significantly raised awareness of the offer for adults with mental health problems and therefore increased community engagement overall. It is clear that these projects need to be long term to build a trusted reputation and work with some of the issues that are embedded within society.

As members are the lead in the development of Growing Together, the project has diversified over recent years to respond to the needs and interests of members. In addition to the therapeutic gardening, the projects now incorporate music, art, yoga relaxation, creative writing, cookery and a range of vocational courses. Some of these groups are led by members themselves. People applying to come to Growing Together often say that they are not interested in gardening, but are attracted to other parts of the Growing Together offer. Once they become members, they often join in with the gardening and do find it beneficial.

One of the key recommendations of Lane's 2014 report was that some women felt that Growing Together was quite a male dominated environment and would like space of their own. Trust Links consequently set up a women's only group on Wednesday afternoons at Growing Together Shoeburyness in 2015. This group has grown and thrives, providing a safe and supportive space for women who prefer the company of other women in a mutually supportive community setting. In 2016 Trust Links piloted a men's group to complement the women's group. Unfortunately the take up for this group was very low so it was closed after a few months.



Growing Together Shoeburyness was awarded £25,000 from The People's Projects voted for by the public, with the highest number of votes in the East of England region

The implementation of Charitylog data management system has provided a significant opportunity for Trust Links staff to improve the quantitative data collection and analysis relating to the Growing Together projects. Now that the tools are in place, Trust Links will be in a better position to capture the impact of the project in a way that can be relayed to partners, funders and the general public.



Growing Together Shoeburyness members celebrate being awarded the Green Flag Community Award in 2017

Recommendations

The key recommendation for development is that Growing Together further develops a data monitoring and evaluation plan that will ensure sufficient outcome data is collected including detailed baseline data, follow up data during the project, and 'exit' data when individuals leave the project. As stated within the report, a limitation of this evaluation was a lack of baseline data from which to make a 'distance travelled' comparison with subsequent assessments. This data is held and had been collected by Growing Together, however, it was not available for analysis from the Charitylog database for inclusion in this report.

As the needs of members continue to change, so will the design and implementation of the Growing Together projects. Over recent years the addition of relaxation groups, Job Club, anxiety management group and other support groups has enhanced the Growing Together offer. Members will continue to shape the offer through their input to the development and implementation of the projects and associated activities.

It is recommended that the Growing Together projects continue to positively engage with members in the design, delivery and evaluation of the projects. Member meetings should be held regularly to steer the development of the projects to ensure that they respond to the identified needs and are member led.

Conclusion

It is clear from the quantitative and qualitative data that the Growing Together Westcliff and Shoeburyness projects contribute to transforming the lives of people with mental illness and mild learning disabilities in Southend. The SWEMWBS demonstrates a 25% improvement in the mental wellbeing measure over a 6 month period. The Growing Together Outcomes measure demonstrate overwhelmingly positive impact on the wellbeing and outcomes of members that access the projects.

Case studies and feedback from other agencies support the quantitative findings, with clear evidence that Growing Together meets a pressing and growing need in the local area. It is anticipated that a further period capturing and collating the quantitative data from the SWEMWBS and Growing Together Outcomes tool would support these findings and provide further evidence to funders and supporters that Growing Together has a significant positive impact on its members and the broader community.

The Growing Together Westcliff and Shoeburyness projects are shaped by members, who have been involved in the design and development of the projects and lead the ongoing development of what the projects offer. This has led to improved mental health, physical health, wellbeing and social outcomes for some of the most vulnerable people in our society.



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