Changed Places, Changed Lives

The social impacts of environmental action

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This report has been produced and edited for BTCV by Chris Church. The report summarises the results of a collaborative research initiative involving BTCV and partners from the Black Environment Network (BEN) and the Evaluation Trust. In every case project participants were actively involved in the research and we are grateful to them for their involvement. The case study texts were produced by Judy Ling Wong of the BEN, Sarah del Tufo and Sue Webber of the Evaluation Trust and Helen Tomb of CVNI. Additional materials came from Clifford Davy of BTCV. The research work was funded by the Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales, and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

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Written by Chris Church

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Foreword

BTCV believes that the environment belongs to everyone, and that everyone has the right to a good quality environment. Sadly, the fact is that disadvantaged and marginalised communities experience poorer quality environments than the majority of the population. The environment sector as a whole has not been good at reaching out to those for whom quality of environment can make a huge difference to quality of life.

In spite of continuing difficulties in securing funding for this area of work, we in BTCV remain determined to challenge both ourselves, and others in the environment sector, to do more. Our Environments for All programme confronted myths about the readiness of Black and Minority Ethnic communities to engage in environmental projects. It set BTCV on a path to becoming more inclusive and more representative of the communities in which we work. “Changed Places, Changed Lives” showcases further work where modest interventions have had powerful impacts on people’s lives.

The report should influence some key government policies, including access to green space; health and well-being; and integration and cohesion. An important lesson is that policy delivery depends not so much on allocation of large sums of money as on stability of funding streams, leading to continuity of relationships with vulnerable individuals and communities.

BTCV owns no land, and claims no ownership of the people and groups we support. We believe that communities are best able to make their voices heard when they can tell their own stories in their own ways. The voices and stories on the following pages are offered to anyone who has an interest in environment, community and well-being. I urge readers to listen, reflect and learn.

Tom Flood CBE
Chief Executive
BTCV
The organisations involved

BTCV is a unique international volunteering organisation providing the bridge between global environmental ideals and local reality. Our vision is a better environment where people are valued, included and involved and our mission is to create a more sustainable future by inspiring people and improving places. Our key values are sustained environmental improvement and inclusiveness, accessibility and choice.

The Black Environment Network promotes equality of opportunity with respect to ethnic communities in the preservation, protection and development of the environment. BEN works to integrate social, cultural and environmental concerns in the context of sustainable development. Our vision is to have representation and participation of ethnic communities in all aspects of the built and natural environment, which reflects the profile of the ethnic population in Britain.

The Evaluation Trust is a community development infrastructure organisation, founded in 1990, which works at a regional level in the South West as well as nationally and internationally to disseminate skills and good practice in participatory evaluation. It has particularly focused on capacity building work with smaller, poorly resourced community and voluntary organisations and their funders in the South West, and also undertakes evaluation work internationally and in England and Wales.

Chris Church is a Director of Community Environment Associates, a consultancy that specialises in policy and practice work around the involvement of local communities in work on sustainable development and environmental action at every level.

The photos in this report are courtesy of:

- Helen Tomb – The ‘Adopt a Highway’ Travellers Project in West Belfast
- Graham Burns – The Glasgow Gardening Course Group
- Clive Ward – The Blaenau Gwent Green Gym
- Rina Choudhury – Food Growing at the Calthorpe Project
- The St. Mary Magdalen Centre Gardening Group
- Matt Wade – Saanjjhi Project

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Introduction

This report looks at the lessons learnt from work on a set of small projects run or supported by BTCV in 2005 and 2006. Looked at from a purely environmental viewpoint these projects were of limited impact, but the research done for this report shows that the wider social impacts of such work may be very significant, especially for those who took part.

Most work that is described as ‘environmental’ is normally seen in one of two ways. It’s about

- The impact of people on the environment (global footprints, waste, pollution and resources, saving energy, and biodiversity) or
- The impact of a poor environment on people (most obviously work on how air pollution that may be causing ill-health and on ‘environmental justice’ issues)

This report looks one stage further: it looks at the impact of engaging with the environment on people and how this may help develop their social identity, and their vision of their future role within the wider community.

It is accepted that our surroundings shape who we are and how we perceive the world. This thus contributes to our social identities and how we relate to others. Having a clear social identity is an essential aspect of developing self-esteem and with that comes empowerment. ‘Yet for anyone in a complex and diverse society, especially if they are recently arrived in that society, it may be very hard to understand how things work, to develop new knowledge and skills and to start to build the relations that can shape and strengthen that social identity.

It is also sadly the case that for many people, especially those in poorer urban communities, interaction with their surroundings includes little or no opportunity to engage with the natural environment. That lack of engagement may be just one part of a wider alienation but it may also contribute to a lack of
interest in and respect for the environment. This may affect not just people’s perceptions of their locality, but also of how they see global issues such as climate change and how they engage in a healthy lifestyle. At a time when it is more important than ever that everyone in our society understands the need for environmental change and action, then it is vital that we understand the best ways to build engagement with our environment. It is also the case that working together on such projects creates a fluid social setting that allows individuals and groups to shape the development of their social identities as an alternative to the constraints of family and institutional settings.

The original title of the project which this report assesses was ‘Collaborative Research to establish the value of the environment in improving social justice’. There was an emphasis on the social impact of environmental work and social activities that run through the ‘Environments for All’ programme (see part 1). The vision differs from more traditional BTCV projects, that were more focused on what people can do for nature. There has been much work on the environmental outcomes of environmental projects: here the challenge is to reveal the social impact and meaning of this work for groups of excluded people who do not traditionally have the opportunity to be involved in environmental work.

“At a time when it is more important than ever that everyone in our society understands the need for environmental change and action, then it is vital that we understand the best ways to build engagement with our environment.”
Part 1: The Environments for All story

Opinion polls suggest that most people are worried about the state of our environment. But far fewer people are actually doing much about it. There are many reasons but all surveys suggest the same key problems:

- People don’t know what to do (and may get confusing messages),
- People don’t know how to get involved, and
- People lack the confidence to get involved

There’s another important reason: many people feel excluded from environmental action, which is often presented as being about complex scientific issues and is only done by well-off well-educated people. In reality that’s not the case, but that perception is one reason for the ‘Environments for All’ programme.

‘Environments for All’

Environments for All (EfA) was conceived in December 1999 as a UK-wide initiative that would allow BTCV to develop its work with disadvantaged and socially excluded communities. The programme aimed to “expand the boundaries of conservation volunteering” and in so doing, change the character and image of the organisation, the way it worked and the kind of staff and volunteers it attracted. The key objectives were to:

- increase the involvement in practical environmental action of marginalised people, and especially those from black and minority ethnic communities:
- disseminate information and publicise good practice to the same end:
- make BTCV more representative, both in the profile of its staff and volunteers and in the way it is run.

BTCV recognised that it is not enough just to say that their programmes and projects are ‘open to everyone’. Many people need stimulation, support and guidance if they are to get actively involved. They also need opportunities to get involved that suit them and their personal circumstances and to be able to shape those opportunities.
To make this happen BTCV started to focus on work with a range of disadvantaged communities rather different to its perceived core audience of committed environmentalists and conservationists. BTCV was already a large organisation, with over 130,000 people taking part in voluntary activity every year, and with around 250,000 in supporting community groups, but for many people the organisation had an image of volunteers, mostly male and mostly white, doing physical labour out in the countryside.

BTCV took on a diverse group of 14 staff, many with a background in community development, to work closely with selected communities in eight locations across the UK. They were encouraged to respond to local need in the most appropriate way, working with and through community support organisations to build respect, transparency and equity that are necessary for volunteer partnerships to flourish. They were tasked with creating a setting within which the participants could help set the agenda.

In Scotland there was specialist support for asylum seekers and refugees, and to the Asian and Black British communities. In Wales, the focus was on Welsh-speakers in the north and on people on low incomes in the south. Throughout Northern Ireland there was work across cultural and social boundaries, including projects with Travellers and the Chinese community. In England, in Oldham, Leicester, Small Heath in Birmingham and the London borough of Brent, the focus was on the black and minority ethnic communities and people with disabilities.

Across the UK, this work dispelled the myth that people from ethnic minorities and other marginalised groups are not interested in taking practical environmental action.

EfA was supported by the Community Fund and by Barclays. At the same time, BTCV was chosen by the New Opportunities Fund as a partner in England in the Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities programme. This enabled BTCV to provide grants to marginalised communities and fuel activities.

EfA initiative ran for three years. In that time over 38,000 people and 1,176 community groups benefited directly from the programme while about 183,000 benefited indirectly. Evaluation showed that:

- 50% of the participants were unemployed, 13% disabled and 44% were from BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) communities;
- Almost 3,000 were asylum seekers or refugees. The vast majority came from disadvantaged urban areas where even small-scale practical environmental action and associated social activities made a real lasting difference;
- BME representation in BTCV’s paid workforce increased from 3% to 5%;
- 250 new key partnerships were formed across the UK, involving The Refugee Council, Home Office Active Communities Directorate, Age Concern, The Muslim Council, the Sensory Trust and Commission for Racial Equality.

Work was also done to open up and change BTCV’s internal work practices including:

- Formal training on cultural diversity and equal opportunities for staff, directors and trustees;
- Encouraging non-EfA staff and volunteers to visit EfA projects to learn good practice by doing and seeing;
- Producing a BTCV community toolkit which draws on lessons learnt to improve staff skills and inform the whole organisation;
- Making greater efforts to involve communities in determining BTCV’s future policy;
- Developing a diversity toolkit and diversity position paper.

In addition to sharing lessons within the organisation, BTCV has looked to extend this learning across the wider environmental sector to help to stimulate and encourage better practice in the context of provision for disadvantaged and socially excluded communities. They have published reviews, case studies and summary reports, and publicised lessons learnt, both positive and negative. Staff collected qualitative evidence that practical environmental action can
make a huge contribution to both personal development and neighbourhood regeneration. BTCV also produced DVDs and videos in which community groups explain what EfA means to them. Finally, there was a conference on EfA in March 2004 and a handbook of the same title, designed to give a hands on approach to getting volunteer groups up and running within excluded communities, and dealing with problems that might arise.

An analysis of 152 projects (England-only Diversity Work Survey) during 2003 showed that BTCV was engaging with a very wide range of people, often under-represented in environmental volunteering, including:

- People from BME communities
- People with health problems
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Those at risk of offending, offenders and ex-offenders
- Older people
- People with a disability
- Young people at risk
- People living in poverty
- Unemployed people
- Travellers
- People disadvantaged by rural isolation
- The homeless

These categories show the diversity of people engaged but they do not show some of the changes behind this work in two key respects. At one level there has been the journey made by BTCV as it moves from being an organisation focusing primarily on conservation to one focused on social and sustainable development. But the other changes have been very local: what has been the impact of this new socio-environmental approach on the communities involved and on the people in those communities? This is the core focus of this publication.

Learning from what has been done

It was clear from the start that it would be important to evaluate this work carefully. At the start of EfA a baseline review of BTCV’s work with disadvantaged communities was done by the Black Environment Network (BEN) in 2001. This was followed by two annual review evaluations for 2001-2 and 2002-3 and a final evaluation report was published in 2004.

Diversity became a major theme in BTCV’s Strategic Plan for 2004-2008, setting out the organisation’s commitment in terms of inclusiveness, accessibility and choice. BTCV repeated its 2003 Diversity Work Survey in 2006 but extended it UK-wide. As before, this survey focused on work with people from communities under-represented in practical environmental action.

The development from the 2003 figures is encouraging. The number of BTCV’s ‘diversity projects’ (projects involving people from under-represented communities) in England had more than doubled, up 109%, from 152 to 317. There was also a big increase in the number of projects that engage with young people at risk (up 417%), people with health problems (up 207%) and ‘other socially disadvantaged’ people like travellers and the homeless (up 164%).

Beyond EfA

Once EfA funding finished, it might have been expected that this work by BTCV would lose its momentum and ability to engage with these communities in a substantial way. The evidence from BTCV’s UK Diversity Work Survey of 2006 shows that this is not true, although some initiatives have not been sustained.

As a result of the culture change instigated as part of the EfA programme, BTCV is now making significant progress in advancing diversity within the environmental sector. They have made what has been described as a ‘seismic shift’ in tackling social exclusion in society because the organisation as a whole has embraced diversity as a key value. The inter-linking of people and environment continues to be central to BTCV’s work. It is clear that the poorest communities also experience the worst quality environments, so BTCV is keen to develop community-led activities that use environmental improvement and the enjoyment of social activities in the natural environment as a driver for all-round improvements to people’s quality of life.

BTCV’s experience is that the environment offers a great opportunity for people to express common values and identity. People of all cultures can be brought together through simple but archetypal experiences such as outdoor play for children, growing and harvesting food, creating and looking after gardens and green space. These activities are enjoyable, purposeful and productive. They provide informal learning and stimulate the motivation to gain more knowledge and skills. The outcomes can be stronger social bonds, improved capacity to direct their own futures as well as better local places for people to enjoy.
At the same time, the environment offers different communities the opportunity to explore and celebrate their distinctiveness. Love of nature is a mainstay of all the world’s cultures and religions, so different groups can bring to it their own stories and traditions to share with others. Ultimately, people’s connection with the land and with nature is an element of that which roots us in a common humanity. Environmental action is a powerful force for both cultural expression and community cohesion.

**Working with the projects**

The EfA work has certainly changed how BTCV works with communities. The second question is how has this changed the communities who have taken part in this work? A range of case studies show very positive responses, but it was also important to look at this in more detail.

To that end BTCV, BEN and the Evaluation Trust set up a project (supported by the Lloyds TSB Foundation and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation) to look at a few projects in more detail with the aim of:

- Examining the impact of EfA on individuals who participated
- Examining the role of the environment in improving and contributing to social justice
- Using the findings to inform future delivery models of community/diversity projects in BTCV
- Sharing the findings and recommendations with the third sector, funders and local/national policymakers.

This work was done through a programme of ‘Collaborative Research’ where the projects themselves were as involved as far as possible in setting the terms of reference for the evaluative work and in carrying it out. It ranged from training community researchers to show the picture from within the projects to using a range of participatory techniques and support to gain insight. This report focuses on the findings of that research.

“Love of nature is a mainstay of all the world’s cultures and religions, so different groups can bring to it their own stories and traditions to share with others.”
Part 2: The case studies

This report is based on six projects launched as part of the EfA programme. Most are relatively small and their environmental impacts are very limited. What is more significant is their social impact, the effect on the lives of those involved that has resulted from their engagement with the environment, and the associated social activities.

Many, indeed most, of those involved are people who would not normally have the opportunity take part in environmental activity or even to experience the natural environment. The experiences recounted by the women in Saanjhi of never having had a holiday or left their inner-city environment are still common. Yet if we are to create a society where environmental concern and effective action are much higher priorities than they are now and where environmental organisations play a purposeful social role, then enabling newcomers to actually experience our natural environment is crucial.

Exclusion from mainstream activity is a common theme within these case studies. That exclusion results from poverty or ill-health, but can also, as in the Belfast study of traveller families, result from deep-rooted cultural prejudices. Getting people involved in practical hands-on activity within a social context has been shown in these, and in many other cases, to be an important way to tackle that exclusion and build more cohesive and sustainable communities.

The cases studied are in two groups. Three projects are looked at in detail:

- The Blaenau Gwent Healthy Foods and Green Gym Project
- A programme of social and environmental activities by residents at the Saanjhi centre in Birmingham
- Work with Traveller families in Belfast

In addition three other projects are also explored:

- A BTCV gardening course in Glasgow
- Food growing at the Calthorpe Project near Kings Cross, London
- A gardening project at the St. Mary Magdalen Centre for Asylum Seekers in London

The way in which these projects were evaluated is described in more detail in section 3. Further information is available on the website: www.btcv.org.uk/changedplaces_changed_lives.
1. The Saanjjhi programme

Saanjjhi provides supported accommodation and assistance, along with emotional, physical, and spiritual support and understanding for Asian women who have suffered severe long-term mental health problems. They are people who have often suffered unbearable social abuse and have little confidence in life. Many of them are also affected by long-term institutionalisation, and have lost connection with the outside world. They are concerned and confused with their social environment. The Saanjjhi rehabilitation centre is funded through Birmingham City Council’s Supporting People programme and is home to up to six women at any time, who may stay for anything from four weeks up to two years. It is an alternative to hospital admission and helps prepare people to live independently in the community.

The staff work hard to provide a secure and nurturing environment, referring to clients as ‘guests’ or as ‘our ladies’. EfA’s outreach programme identified Saanjjhi as a potential participating project at an early stage, when the idea of some possible activities for the ladies was discussed. From this came a three year programme of activities that has some very positive and significant impacts.

Work with BTCV

Creativity is a valued part of the house ethos, and they aspire to organise group activities. It is recognised that such activities play a key role in the way the house works towards the recovery of the ladies. Staff were keen to encourage them to participate in outside activities but they had no budget for this, and no expertise on engaging with the natural environment. The activities that they did with BTCV would be taken for granted by most people but for many of those involved these were a huge step forward. For the centre, it was a revelation. These activities included:

- A residential countryside trip
- The acquisition of an allotment where ‘the ladies’ grew vegetables and plants
- A trip to the Wedgwood factory
- A canal boat trip
- A visit to a botanic garden
- A trip to an organic farm

“No one told me India was also here…”
Initial activities were one-off day trips. The canal boat trip offered a chance to explore the canal and experience the local environment but for most it was also their first experience of being in a boat in the UK, connecting with the natural elements of water and canal-side flora. It also provided a base for walks around the city centre – something that the ladies would not normally consider doing. The trip to the Wedgwood factory needed careful planning and management but offered a wide range of social interactions and an opportunity to do some hands-on work with artists working at the factory. The benefits of such activities were clear from the reactions of the guests:

“The trip to the Wedgwood factory was good where cups, saucers plates were made. I have not seen such factory before; big machines, it is like cooking baking cakes in the oven. Everything seems huge and only machineries working few people working in the place, it was fascinating to see such things.”

“At first I thought it would be boring to see plates and so on being made, I was not interested but wanted to go for the sake of going out. I was worried I do not know why? I am now glad that I went, I really enjoyed myself. It was a lot of walking and following everyone. I was frightened that I might get lost but got so much interested and started reading the history; how it come from stone and so on. I started observing and questioning.”

The food was good enjoyed it so much, we ate outside like the other people did. Everybody was friendly and happy. I bought gifts to take home for my family and friends. I was surprised and was confused for a while wondered whether we were in England, because there were no Asian people about. I had to ask the staff where we were. It was so different from Birmingham, even the roads and houses were different.”

“We had so much fun in the mini bus, we laughed and jokes and sing songs happily that I forgot my fears and anxieties, everybody was happy and I was not bothered what to expect. I am glad now I went.”

The environment became an increasingly important factor in the work alongside social interaction with the BTCV worker and people in the outside world. A trip to the local Botanic Garden gave guests a chance to explore local and tropical plants, flowers, trees and fruits. They took photographs and discussed issues around designs and colours. As before simple activities like shopping and meals at the restaurant helped build confidence and engagement. A visit to an organic Farm took this one step further. They explored the ways of planting seeds, trees, vegetables and got engaged with various ways of disposing waste for making compost. Walking round the farm was a learning experience and the day also offered a chance to discuss healthy eating issues.

From all this came two bigger projects. One was taking on an allotment on a nearby site. An initial visit focused on planting and work on a mosaic style table for one allotment. This included doing the design and working with a range of materials. Guests were able to visit the allotment regularly to watch the growth of the plants. As a result the house now has an allotment of our...
own. This longer-term commitment has been sustained following the end of the BTCV-funded activities and offers an ongoing opportunity to engage with practical environmental activity.

The major event of the programme was a three day trip into the countryside staying on a farm. This gave them an opportunity for informal leisure as well as trips out to the Ironbridge museum and a pottery workshop. The personal meaning of the activities and the natural environment played a key role in benefiting the ladies. Everyday activities such as eating in small restaurants continued to build social skills and confidence. For most of the residents the experience of being outside their own normal environment was in itself an important and transforming one:

“No one told me India was also here. I felt lost and confused and could not understand for a while as I stood admiring the countryside. I asked several times whether I was in India. I love the countryside it took me back; my memories of India, my childhood playing in the field, the horses, the barn, hay in that moment I was lost, at the same time I could not stop laughing to myself. I just could not believe that I was actually seeing this. Every morning I stood outside admiring the surroundings. I did not know there was countryside in this country. I often heard people talked about holidays I did not know what holidays meant. I would like to go again.”

“It was so lovely in the cottage where we stayed it was so nice to be in a different place with my friends and staff with me. At first, I was so scared the thought of going away into a different place, the thought of travelling a long distance, all thoughts appeared in my mind, whether I would came back, what would happen if I got lost, it went on and on but at the same time I was excited too, hearing the word holiday. I often thought what holiday was. At times my mind says yes I want to go at other time my mind says no. I have never been so happy, I never been on holidays before in this country or in India except for a short outing.”
“I enjoyed the games we played different games every night it was fun. We shared and talked together a lot. I tried to speak in English language because I was on holiday although the staff would speak in Punjabi. It was so funny. I enjoyed eating out at different places, and I did not have to pay at all. Holidays I have never had or seen. The place was so different and beautiful I like the lake. I enjoyed the games we played every night was different, lots of gifts. We sang and danced and I laughed so much. I was very happy.”

“I lived in this country for approximately 22 years. I have never been on holiday before. I have been on a day trip but nothing like this. In this country I lived a lonely life, so isolated. Every day was a wonderful and beautiful experience for me. During the time of our journey, I felt lonely and was afraid to go, as I have not been to a strange place and I was frightened what to expect. In a cottage of our own in the country side it felt like home, I saw a horse in the field I took me back so many years ago in Pakistan where we lived playing in the field. It seemed so different. Although I was tired and at times I was not well, I still wanted to carry on as I did not want to miss out and wanted to explore more. There was a lot to see, I felt tired but I still felt like carrying on walking. I lost my fear everything was good.”

“I was so scared and did not like to go and spend a night outside this place even though we talked about how safe it would be and as I also went to see the place I still was frightened, frightened to get lost and what would happen to me. The thought of dogs attacking me getting into the house was frightening to me. I have never been on holidays before except in India where I was bitten by a dog when I was…"
I was so scared to go to a strange place was difficult to imagine. I did not want to go at first as we spoke about it almost everyday, I felt little bit scared. It was true I felt good once I was there after a while everything was easy. My friends and family had not seen country side holidays and I could not wait to share my experience of the place. Everything was good.

“...young also staying in a strange house where I have not stayed before and the thought of sleeping in a strange bed was also frightening. I was wrong, I saw a dog but the dog did not come near me, the place was beautiful, the countryside was beautiful. Once I was there I was happy and safe. Everybody was good and we had lots of fun. I was also worried about my medications, I was getting lots of stories in my mind but everything was okay.”

“I was worried when the decision made that all of us were going on holiday in the country side. I thought I would not be allowed to because of my disabilities. I did not find it hard but it was painful when I got in and out of the transport. I walked so slow but still I wanted to carry on. Everybody was so helpful. I sat in the wheelchair during the Museum tour which I enjoyed so much to see. The country side was so beautiful.”

“I was so scared to go to a strange place was difficult to imagine. I did not want to go at first as we spoke about it almost everyday, I felt little bit scared. It was true I felt good once I was there after a while everything was easy. My friends and family had not seen country side holidays and I could not wait to share my experience of the place. Everything was good.”
The comments of the staff also showed how these activities affected the guests and the overall programme of enabling recovery:

“The ladies was worried, had a mixture of problems. At first some were not bothered or interested just want to go out and eat; some terrified to go out in a strange place, some refused to go and would rather stay home and sleep. For others it was very difficult to get them to get ready; fear of going out or being attacked.”

“Over all, all enjoyed themselves, they were so happy, fascinated by the way the factory floor works with large, massive machineries; does its job. Artist painting with dexterity and skills made us more fascinated and interested. It was so good that most of the ladies asked questions and some tried to read what was written on the boards about the process of work.”

“It is the understanding and knowledge that the ladies gain. It was a successful day. The BTCV staffs organised this trip were very helpful and friendly it made everything so easy for everybody.”

“The holiday cottage’ as they call it was brilliant and very successful; it ended with enjoyable and memorable experiences for most of the ladies. Some or most of the ladies had not experience the meaning of holidays in a strange environment in this country for where they came from India or Pakistan they have seen and reminded their experiences of the country side that they could not believe that there were such places in this country.”
This journey was the life time experience for some, as no one has given to them till now. Their eyes bright with fascinations; they observe the beauty of the country side, they stood in amazement. The fear and anxiety had disappeared; they were all very happy like one big family; the care and support was there; they now know that it is possible to go anywhere and be together to explore and share ideas."

"This gift of a chance to explore the country side, a holiday as they call it, made so much difference in their life. To breathe the air; explore the beauty of the nature and its surroundings was a lot to take for some; they looked with wonders, they shared their excitement with their families and friends. The smile in their eyes was enough to understand their feelings. Once again, thank you so much for the emotional and financial support that BTCV have provided us."

The outcomes of this work
No matter how good the services are that they experience, the Saanji ‘ladies’ live within the context of essential 24-hour care and the limitations of an urban residential centre that has no resources to provide extra activities. Any objective evaluation in this context inevitably has some problems that result in part from working with vulnerable people and also from having little to compare to. But the achievements and outcomes are clear because they relate to human processes that we all experience to some degree.

The evaluation of the social impact was done by the Saanji worker Balbir, trained and supported as a community researcher by the Black Environment Network. This involved facilitating a group discussion with the ladies and the use of various techniques including observation, record keeping and analysis by Balbir. The results are summarised in Matrix 2 (See Appendix). It is perhaps not surprising that with a limited and close group there was a high degree of unanimity about their experiences. All reported positive social impacts in terms of:

- Better connections with the outside world
- Increased motivation and ability to build relationships
- More faith in people and the world
- Moving away from negative life experiences
- Increased ability to communicate

On the basis of their feedback and that of the staff, as shown in the quotes above, it is clear that this was a remarkably positive programme.

The insights by the community researcher suggest that a socio-environmental programme of activities can have a significant impact through providing opportunities for the personal growth and therefore recovery of people with severe mental health problems in a rehabilitation programme. The staff at Saanji are keen to see something continue, and this work has demonstrated clearly the importance and value of connecting people with the outside world in the context of the special stimulus of the natural environment.

The full report by Balbir and the outcome matrixes are available on the website and in the Appendix.
The Green Gym works predominantly in the Ebbw Fach valley with a string of communities stretching over 10 miles from Brynmawr to Swffryd. As a former coal mining and heavy industry area it has been the focus of environmental improvement and economic and social regeneration and is part of the Welsh Assembly Government’s flagship programme for tackling deprivation. But the collapse of the mining and associated industries hit the communities hard. Local BTCV workers and other community development staff describe gaining volunteers in the valleys as difficult.

A key feature of Green Gym is the focus on practical work which helps people engage; this makes joining a group easy as it is about the work, enjoying others’ company, feeling supported and even friendship. Tasks are adapted to meet the needs of the individual.

Work by BTCV and the volunteer team
Blaenau Gwent Green Gym has developed a loyal team of volunteers supported by a BTCV project worker. This regular small team, with a range of ages and abilities and disabilities, is very open to others when they join in activities. The group includes people who are potentially isolated by:

- being older - over 70
- learning difficulties
- physical disabilities - hearing, mobility
- ill health - diabetes, heart condition
- mental health issues - depression, bi-polar disorder
- low income and / or unemployment
- previous or current caring responsibilities
Their attendance and commitment to the group to turn out in all weathers, despite considerable personal discomfort for some, is remarkable. More importantly they engage with the Green Gym without labels and stereotypes. Intergenerational work is also really important to participants. One volunteer works for the Green Gym three days a week on event planning, office work, projects and occasional events and was fully involved in the research and evaluation.

The volunteer team brings in many other individuals as much of the work is carried out in partnership with other organisations. These include Roseheyworth school, the Owl Sanctuary, Roseheyworth Woodland, and church and community groups. The group has recently won a national BTCV Green Heroes Awards 2007 Green Gym of the Year. They also won the Wales award.

The project has done a wide range of work over the past years, all of which has played a role in developing the social networks around the project. This work includes:

### Conservation work
- Created and worked on a school allotment
- Supporting an Owl Sanctuary
- Made bird boxes at Sanctuary and Youth Club
- Cleaned out rivers
- Bird Projects - visits to Slimbridge and RSPB bird watches

### Social and Community Action
- Health and nature walks
- Arts projects around ‘What the environment means to us’; canvas displays at Bryn Bach Park with outdoor activities for the families and volunteers
- Working on a graveyard and cleaned the church railings
- Supported children to complete art murals
- Demonstrated pumpkin types, carving pumpkins, cooking with pumpkins
- Went litter picking
- Learnt willow weaving and recreated a hillside willow ‘snake’
- Wrote regular columns for the Green Gym in grassroots papers
- Links with other Green Gyms

### Healthy Food
- Wild fruit picking – followed by food preparation using fruit, involving community members in identifying and picking
- Smoothie demonstrations encouraging children and adults to eat more fresh fruit
- Cooking evenings
Assessing the outcomes
The Green Gym volunteers and staff worked with the Evaluation Trust over several months to discover and document the difference the work has made to individuals, community groups and the wider community, and ‘what works’ and ‘why’. The volunteers were involved in:

- defining the questions
- collecting the views of volunteers and participants through focus groups and interviews, some while taking part in outdoor activities to celebrate the art canvases
- observing how the group works together and how the paid worker effectively organises the group
- talking with volunteer workers in partner groups at the Owl Sanctuary, and the community woodland
- an evaluation afternoon in the Primary school with both children and staff

Work with Roseheyworth Millennium School
The school project has been very productive. Just as the volunteers had gained personally from working in the school, the evaluation showed how valued the Green Gym was in the school by children, staff and caretaker, and ultimately by parents and the community. The school organised an afternoon for children to participate in evaluative focus groups, valuing the opportunity for them to express their views and be listened to.

Within the school the work of the Eco Committee, school-wide work, and classroom work together with the Green Gym on the environment and healthy eating, are closely integrated and complement each other. Areas include recycling, planting and growing, care of the school environment, including litter picking, eating healthily, running a ‘healthy’ tuck shop, feeding, observing and identifying birds.

The Green Gym worked with the children to plant, nurture and harvest fruit and vegetables from an allotment of raised beds and in recycled tyres. Harvested food has been cooked for school lunches to which Green Gym volunteers were invited. There was an art competition for design of the garden, and activities like pumpkin carving, looking at different varieties of pumpkin, and making pumpkin soup. Together with the Healthy Foods Coordinator, the Green Gym made fruit and vegetable ‘smoothies’ in school and at the school fete.

Children have also taken part in an environmental art project, and the school hosted part of the Green Gym Third Birthday celebration in November 2006. A current project is a tomato growing challenge involving distributing small plants within the school, to families, volunteers and in the community, including a youth club and a community home. There are 6 different varieties of tomato and a competition around growth, timing of flowering and fruiting, and there will be a chance for children to assess different flavours. The caretaker gives significant volunteer time to support the success of the allotment, helping build the raised beds, watering, clearing shrubs, working with the volunteers.

The children have been very engaged:

“The Green Gym helps us grow plants, and helps our environment.”

“Eating our own carrots – so we had fresher food – nicer and fresher... the ones from our garden were more tasty and had a nicer texture.”

“We planted tomatoes, we water and look after the; they have different names.” (she could remember 3)

“Having a lot of vegetables so that the school could stay healthy.”

The adults identified a wide range of benefits for the children, the school as a whole and the wider community. The children benefited from practical experience of growing and eating healthy food, working with adults other than teachers, being involved in creating a ‘richer’ environment (it is built on the scrub land formed from an old coal tip and before Green Gym there were no birds!), and making links with the global curriculum. There were clear links with the curriculum and it involved the whole school – classes, caretaker, and canteen and had contributed to the assessment for the Eco Schools Green Flag Award.
There was evidence that children took their knowledge into their wider families and the community. For several children, gardening had contributed significantly to their development and self esteem at school, and generally children benefited from working in groups outside with adults.

**Arts Projects**

The Green Gym organised art projects for children and volunteers over a six month period at 6 community venues, with an artist from Blaenau Gwent Arts Development. The work they produced was then displayed at Bryn Bach Park. The Green Gym worker organised for around 40 children and adults to view the canvasses together and participate in Orienteering, Archery, Canoeing and a Nature Walk.

Children and volunteers shared their artwork with pride. Children, families new to Green Gym including grandparents and existing volunteers participated in the physical activities in an integrated way – all learning new skills together and all supporting each other and achieving together. An adult with learning difficulties was delighted that he succeeded at canoeing. It takes a lot of planning, organisation and coordination to create such a successful integrated day for this wide range of people.

The children were interviewed by two volunteers, a mother and her daughter. They said they made new friends, gained new skills, and enjoyed the sense of achievement. The parents valued the benefits for their children meeting and mixing with other people of all ages, together with raising their confidence and environmental awareness.

**Outcomes for members**

Several group members have mental health problems, and the evaluation showed how involvement has enabled them to make big changes. It was recognised that the economic problems had damaged local community spirit and that it is hard to get people engaged. It was important to have an office that was very community based. Working out of doors as a group brought health benefits – mental, physical and emotional. Some loved the opportunity to walk safely on the hills and pick wild fruit.

> “I love to wander the mountains and I feel safe with other people.”

> “I suffer with depression and didn’t like going out, but I so liked the company, going out in the environment, being busy as a group; it’s nice knowing what you can and can’t do, helping each other, getting to know each other.”

> “I am manic depressive, I didn’t really leave the house for 10 years, getting out, and doing stuff has made a difference.”

> “It gets people out of the house, alleviates depression, puts a smile on your face.”

> “The Green Gym grows on you, benefiting the community, benefiting yourself.”
Volunteers really appreciate getting out and meeting people. Involvement brings affirmation, a sense of self worth, and new found confidence. They value working with a range of people including people with physical disabilities, children and young people, people with learning difficulties and older people, on an equal basis.

The specific projects also brought direct benefits. Volunteers appreciated learning about healthy foods and gaining cooking skills. Some had significantly changed what they and their children ate and felt they could now eat better on their low income.

“I have learnt to cook vegetables differently – I cook for the children and they eat it.”

“I have improved my cookery skills. I am on low income and I am now looking at food in a different light – I buy and cook fresh stuff within my budget; I try different recipes. I have bought a mixer for making smoothies.”

The volunteers also loved working in schools and on the arts projects with children, and had seen the ‘life focus’ it had given certain children. Feeling welcomed by the school and children had been affirming of them as adults.

“I enjoy all aspects; I loved working with children, planting bulbs. I met a lovely teacher, then had enough confidence to ask to go back and read a story I had written to the children. It was so lovely to be welcomed into the school. The children drew pictures based on the story and there was a prize for the best.”

There was a strong sense of shared achievement between the Green Gym and the community groups with whom they worked. They valued a seamlessness and informality about the volunteers doing what was needed and of an ongoing productive relationship. Many practical environmental tasks have been achieved and help from the Green Gym makes a huge difference. For example, it was stimulating for residents of a residential home.

“Green Gym cares for our environment so that the Owl Sanctuary can look after the birds.”

“The Green Gym has been fantastic, when I have been struggling… (the worker) will phone and say can we help.”

Working with the Green Gym has helped people make changes in their attitudes and in their lives and led to other opportunities. Examples include group members taking a place on a Regeneration Board, getting a paid job with people with learning disabilities, developing a local Community Centre and acquiring an allotment.
Impact on the wider community

Local groups, the school and volunteers identified wider impacts on their community:

Environmental benefits

- Environmental improvements
- Churchyards and hedges tidied up
- Woodlands improved
- People using areas they have not used before
- Children make 150 bird boxes and placed these in the community

Health Benefits

- Abertillery chip shop refurbished and doing smoothies and home made soup
- Healthier eating
- Younger children seem more willing to try healthy foods and get involved with environmental work

Community engagement and involvement

- A changed energy to make things happen
- Children in the school and youth clubs changing the attitudes of their parents
- Extended families involved in activities – e.g. the ‘growing’ competitions

“Volunteers really appreciate getting out and meeting people. Involvement brings affirmation, a sense of self worth, and new found confidence.”
I don’t go to school so this is something to do and I like it.

Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland (CVNI) have been working with the Travelling community in West Belfast for over ten years. The Adopt a Highway project started in 2005 adding a new dimension to the work and as an evaluation by the people who benefit from the work - the Travellers.

Through a programme of environmental education workshops and practical conservation projects, project staff have established a high level of trust with the Travelling community allowing good working relationships with a community often shunned by the majority of the settled population.

The Adopt a Highway project aimed to involve local people in environmental improvements along a main road, increasing social cohesion in disadvantaged areas. The Glen Road in West Belfast was selected for the project. It borders the most disadvantaged estates in West Belfast, which are still scarred from the Troubles in Northern Ireland. As a result, the communities living within these areas have become marginalised and isolated from the wider population of Belfast. The area suffers from high levels of domestic crime, such as burglary, car theft and ‘joy riding’, just as organised paramilitary activities are decreasing.

Families of Irish Travellers live within these communities, residing in sites allocated by Belfast City Council and maintained by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The families have connections with these sites dating back twenty years and generations of children have attended the local primary school, which is now attended solely by Traveller children. The majority of the 2000 strong Traveller community throughout Northern Ireland live in Belfast, predominantly along or near the Glen Road.

The Travelling community is the most disadvantaged and socially excluded minority ethnic group in Northern Ireland. In a recent survey 57% of those questioned stated they would not accept Travellers as residents in their local area and 66% were not willing to accept a Traveller as a work colleague. A further 40% did not accept Travelling as a way of life and therefore felt they should not be supported by local Government.
Work by CVNI

The Travellers project became the focus of community development work through CVNI’s ‘Environments for All’ programme. They were identified as a community who have the least access to volunteering opportunities and who would benefit most from improvements. Work with the Travellers has continued after the close of the EfA funding through the determination to secure ongoing funding and a desire to maintain and develop relationships.

The Adopt a Highway project focused on the Traveller community and was delivered through various media. Children from the Kelly family were invited to evaluate the work they had carried out with CVNI over the past year. At the start of the project the family consisted of eight children, ranging from age three to seventeen with the ninth child being born mid way through the project. The project was also supported by An Munia Tober (Travellers Support Group) who won the Community Group Award in BTCV’s Green Heroes Awards 2006 as a result of the support they gave the project.

The initial stages of the project aimed at gaining the trust of the children, who would be involved throughout the project, and their parents. Informal site visits to CVNI’s wildflower nursery in South Belfast allowed the children access to the countryside in a safe and controlled environment. The children had the freedom to explore the different species of wildflowers, shrubs and trees and to gain close up experience of nature first hand. The children also took part in environmental games and activities, designed to open their eyes to their natural surroundings – something denied to them by the stark concrete dwelling site where they live. As part of the site visits, the children were also introduced to a healthy diet with the provision of healthy snacks such as fruit, which did not form part of their regular diet at home.

CVNI worked closely with An Munia Tober to identify areas for improvement within the Travellers’ sites along the Glen Road. Margaret Kelly, whose children were involved in the project, proposed a particular site for development. Staff encouraged Margaret to help with the design of the site and to select materials and plants which would be accepted by the extended Traveller family living on the site. Margaret and her family supported the project and helped build relations between CVNI and the Travelling community.

The project focused on an area overgrown with weeds and used as a dumping ground for machinery. Some of the land was transformed into a green oasis of healthy shrubs, trees and wildflowers. Volunteers worked to improve the area and as the project progressed, support from members within the Travelling community grew. Local residents of the site recognised the value of the work undertaken and proposed further possible sites for similar improvements.
communities to celebrate all that had been achieved. The attendance of both sides at such an event was a new idea and a challenge to CVNI. Flyers were distributed throughout both the Settled and Travelling communities. The event was held in Tullymore Community Centre in the heart of Andersonstown Estate. Outreach workers from An Munia Tober made personal visits to many of the Travelling families to encourage attendance from both the children involved in the project and their families, and Community Project Officers from CVNI worked with the Settled Community to encourage local residents to attend the event.

All efforts were rewarded as over one hundred and twenty people filled the community hall. Both communities were well represented, with a good mix of ages from toddlers to pensioners. The Director of An Munia Tober was amazed by the high attendance from the Travelling Community stating it was the “biggest social gathering of Travellers” he had seen in recent years.

The event ‘kicked off’ with a 5-side football match between youths representing the two communities. The match was played with good spirits, even though the final score was 6-0 to the Settled Team. Sinn Fein Councillor Michael Brown presented the winning team with a trophy and a re-match was scheduled for late autumn. The event was well attended by local elderly residents, who had entered a draw to determine who was to receive the lovely window boxes created by the children. Young Traveller girls entertained the crowd by singing traditional Travelling songs. Everyone was encouraged to join in and the hall was filled with the sound of voices, young and old, singing. The singing was followed by a first class buffet, provided by a local caterer and an open music session.

Assessing the work

A local Community Development worker was engaged at the start of the project in a training and evaluation role, working directly with the Traveller children. The role was two-fold – to engage the children in an assessment process, looking at their thoughts on previous and current projects they were involved with and to act as an overall evaluator of the project.

The project had a positive start with a great relationship developing between the children and the evaluator. A series of photographs taken by the children on activity days with CVNI were produced, starting the process of the evaluation of our work. The photographs were taken on trips to CVNI’s Wildflower Nursery by the children using disposable and digital cameras and on following practical tasks at the After School Club.

There was some disruption when the Kelly family went to visit relatives in England for four weeks during the delivery period of the project. On their return, the family needed time to resettle and the children focused their attention on school and had little time for the project. During this break the local evaluator was unfortunately forced to move on to other work.

Evaluation of the project was picked up by CVNI staff who made use of their good relationship with the family to work with the children to achieve results. Staff encouraged the children to talk about how they felt about the work they had done and what it means to them when they see the plants and trees from their caravans. The children spoke positively, smiling at the memories of planting the shrubs, watering them and chasing their young cousins from playing in the garden. With regular visits to the site the family have developed a sense of trust with Project Staff and have displayed a sense of ownership over the project they have helped create.
The children were very clear when asked how the activities made them feel:

“I like working with the plants, they make the place look better.”

“I like it when you come here in the red van because I like being outside helping you plant.”

“Working on the boxes was good fun, me and my friend did one and it looked really good.”

“I told my friend about planting the plants and she was jealous and wants to help.”

“When you started working here my brothers helped a bit and I wanted to join in. I like it now.”

“I didn’t know how to plant these before and now I do.”

They talked of how the activities made a difference to their lives:

“I don’t go to school so this is something to do and I like it.”

“The flowers make this place much better.”

“It’s my job to water the flowers. I do it every week.”

“I know where plants come from and how to look after them. I want to be a gardener.”

“My brother loves digging when you come up here. He looks after the plants so they are here when you come back.”

“I liked the day we went to get the award with An Munia Tober (Green Heroes 2006) and you bought us ice creams for being quiet, that was good.”
The outcomes of the project

The project continues to have a positive effect on the children, their parents and the wider Travelling community who share the site. Whilst many of the outputs are easily measured (the number of shrubs and trees planted, the number of days volunteered etc.), many of the others are seemingly immeasurable, such as one child apologising for hitting his sister while working with us – the first apology she ever received from him! The children have also become guardians of the site, making it a ‘no go’ area for other children to play in because they were damaging the plants.

The children also protected the plants during recent works to install a more efficient electricity supply to the site which threatened some of the plants being uprooted by contractors. The children stood by the plants forcing the contractors to take more caution when using machinery and change the foot access to the site – a display of ownership over their site.

Some of the children have returned to formal education part time and practical work on the site is organised round the days they are not at school in order to encourage them to attend classes and working on the project is a bonus for going to school. A recent practical workday coincided with a site visit from the local Housing Executive to inspect the serviced site they provide for the family. A new member of staff challenged the activities on the site as they had not been made aware of the project. The family quickly defended the project, stating the work was done for them with their children because no one else was going to help them.

The Adopt a Highway project was very successful as a community development initiative, creating links between the Travelling and Settled communities. Much of the success stems from the development of trust between community workers and members of the Travelling community. Through the project the children produced a number of wonderful window boxes for the elderly residents as well as achieving shrub and fruit tree planting for their own residential site and landscaping of the After School Club they attended daily.

“Work with the Travellers has continued after the close of the EfA funding through the determination to secure ongoing funding and a desire to maintain and develop relationships.”
4. The Glasgow Gardening Course Group

BTCV runs a range of short courses. Their basic gardening course is one of these and an evaluation of a small group participating in such a course run in Glasgow showed how even these lower profile activities can have important social impacts on excluded people.

The course ran for one morning a week over 10 weeks. Six people took part – three women and two men came to the participatory evaluation workshop. The three women were asylum seekers from the Congo. They were attending college every day except for the morning each week with BTCV. The rest of their time was occupied with caring for their children. They are under constant stress because of their status. Two have been in the UK for 5 years, with no idea of when a decision will come. They say that it makes them live from day to day and feel that they are living with no visible future. Two understand everything said and speak good English, while the third understands most of what is being said.

The two white men are unemployed, and have mental health issues. The younger man has an environmental degree but had stayed at home for 2 years ‘doing nothing’. The older man had found that volunteering with BTCV suited him very well and this has now become central to his life.

Working with BTCV

The Red Cross’s local support centre linked the three women with the course, while the older man came through his ongoing direct contact with BTCV. The younger man found the opportunity on the Internet. Apart from the older man all were newcomers to BTCV. The course itself is straightforward – planting seeds, taking care of plants at different stages, using tools, preparation of soil, etc. The course leader was also able to take the participants on trips to the local botanical garden and out into the local countryside.

Inevitably for a limited course where people had a range of pressures doing any detailed evaluation posed a challenge. Five participants came together for a structured participatory evaluation workshop, using a format developed from the outcomes of the Saanjhi report. This made it clear that the benefits of the course were quite varied, and had similarities to those revealed by Saanjhi. There were the immediate ones related to the enjoyment of gardening as the participants developed the skills that they could take away and use:

“How can one make friends without being able to speak the language?”
It is fascinating to discover what nature is like and how wonderful it is through gardening, for example, these tiny seeds – who would imagine they grow into onions or leeks.

For the asylum seekers there were other important benefits. The first was the opportunity to work together speaking English:

Being in this group really helped me to speak English – things are repeated, the people the same. One cannot learn at college although there are many students in the class. Everyone in the class has poor English and you do not hear English being spoken by British people, or have a familiar setting with people who accept you.

The second was the benefit of the opportunity to engage socially:

It was so lonely before. How can one make friends without being able to speak the language? There is no one to introduce us to anyone. It is good to be part of a group doing something. One does not have to talk, but one hears everything repeated and it helps you to learn a language and to speak socially. It is the same people all the time and you begin to get to know them and trust them and become friends.

The two men talked about the benefit of an alternative social setting and coming into contact with people and experiences that their usual circles did not provide:

After being ill, I could not start again and think about work or people. People at BTCV do not judge me negatively for having no job or having life difficulties. There is no pressure of this kind here. It gave me the space to find my way in my own time. I was encouraged to go to study and go to university but I now think the choices were wrong for me. I would like something more practical.
“For us, where would one really get a real experience of what asylum seekers are like? My dad has very narrow views. This group has allowed me to get to know them as people and find out they are nothing like what you read in the paper. It has been very important to me to discover this. I now really want society to support asylum seekers and understand and address the problems we create for them. I also want to share skills and exchange skills with people from other cultures. It is so interesting.”

“It is lovely to be a volunteer and feel appreciated for contributing to others’ lives. Without an experience like this, many people, especially if they are poor, do not want to volunteer. They think ‘why should they ask me to do something for nothing when we have no money?’ Like me, they need an experience to find out what they can gain. It is not true that all unemployed people want to do nothing. We have really bad press. I want to contribute. Here I have found something that is not a job but I am contributing.”
The benefits of the course

The immediate social benefits of making new friends, the impact on their quality of life in terms of settling into the language and culture of British life, and the new knowledge and skills gained are clear from the comments above. For the women, longer-term outcomes remain totally dependent on a decision as to their status. Both the men clearly benefited. The younger man used the setting to develop his own identity. His new interest has grown into an aspiration to be a gardener. The older white man says that through BTCV he has discovered the social meaning and values of volunteering and that he wants to work in the voluntary sector. He is keen to promote volunteering and support new volunteers.

The participatory workshop format and the outcome matrices are on the website and in the Appendix.

“...The immediate social benefits of making new friends, the impact on their quality of life in terms of settling into the language and culture of British life, and the new knowledge and skills gained are clear..."
“Watching seeds grow into plants…”

The Centre operates from the basement of St. Mary Magdalene church on the Holloway Road in North London beside a local park. It runs a drop-in service providing basic advice and information for asylum seekers, ESOL (English as a Second Language) classes, interpreting and translation services, art and computer classes, and other services for some 80 learners. These are mostly women, and are mainly Turkish Kurds, Albanians, Kosovans and Congolese. Many experience significant mental health issues. 25 local volunteers and staff run the centre.

In 2005, the Park Ranger and a BTCV Community Engagement Officer helped a group of learners start to cultivate a bed in the park. This idea emerged as part of a park consultation with the park users which included dog walkers, young people, the Church, the Centre learners and a group described as ‘the drinkers’. BTCV identified this project as one very relevant to the aims of Environments for All and hoped to establish a collaborative evaluation with the Evaluation Trust. It soon became clear that there was not a ‘gardening group’ as such, but just some individuals who were interested and the ‘project’ was in danger of disappearing.

The Centre staff were over-stretched, so BTCV and the Evaluation Trust worker recruited Helen, a volunteer with a background in teaching ESOL and gardening experience in March 2006. She wanted to use this opportunity to find work in the environmental field and made good use of the free training BTCV offers volunteers. The aim of the Gardening project was to help empower and support the asylum seekers to cultivate a park bed next to the Centre as an enjoyable experience that could also relate to their ESOL work.

The learners who became involved were mostly from rural backgrounds with experience of agriculture and were all on low incomes. They hoped to grow vegetables but unfortunately, hygiene and security issues in
a public park meant that this was not viable. Instead, it was decided to concentrate on growing flowers with an emphasis on environmental sustainability – perennials and hardy annuals which would self-seed rather than bedding plants, avoidance of pesticides and herbicides, and increasing soil fertility through organic means.

The volunteer prepared some relevant ESOL learning materials but initial consultation with all the groups involved revealed conflicting ideas. The tutors were willing for learners to do the gardening in class time but the learners prioritised learning English. There was little interest in gardening before or after classes as most learners had to pick up children. Some centre staff felt that the garden should be fairly low key to avoid drawing unwanted attention, whilst the BTCV worker felt that the project should promote the centre and its learners. The ideas were hard to reconcile.

In the end a number of learners did the work during lunch hours. The beds were transformed despite poor soil but the hot summer involved much weeding and watering and many seedlings died due to hot weekends and dog trampling. Some learners were quite disappointed and it was hard to keep up the interest. There was also a problem with dogs in the park – many learners were scared of dogs or come from cultures where dogs are seen as unclean animals. One learner was surprised to learn that one of the dog walkers was Turkish; they talked and new understanding was reached. This was the first time the learners had ever spoken to the dog-walkers or the ‘drinkers’.

The volunteer organised a trip for learners to buy plants at a garden centre which they enjoyed. The Centre organiser set up a visit to Kew Gardens which was a great success. The learners found this interesting, and recognised plants from their own countries. However, whilst there was lots of help with the planting, the volunteer ended up doing much of the work with only sporadic help from the learners.

By the autumn, many of the learners who had been involved had moved on, and the volunteer found it hard to engage the new intake. The BTCV worker had a new job and was not replaced because of the loss of funding. By March the volunteer needed to move on, and though two key volunteers were willing to participate in the garden club, the Centre did not feel able to support a new gardening volunteer on their own.
The evaluation work

The plan was to engage gardening project participants, the Centre staff, the gardening project volunteer, the BTCV worker and others in a process to assess the value of the work done through the gardening project work for the participants, the centre and in small ways the wider community. Critical to the evaluation work was the involvement of the BTCV volunteer and a core of learners in undertaking interviewing of other participants. Because of capacity, the evaluation only involved the volunteer writing a reflective report and working with one of the group members to interview others, with the Evaluation Trust worker undertaking some interviews of wider stakeholders.

The difference the Gardening project made

When asked what they liked about the garden club, the participants noted both learning about gardening, the enjoyment of achievement and happiness at working with plants, and being with friends.

When asked what they had achieved from the garden club, the participants identified the satisfaction of learning and seeing things grow:

- Watching seeds grow into plants.
- I learnt a lot of things; it helped with my exam; I made an English friend.
- After digging I plant and sow the flowers.
- Conversations with others about plants.

Everyone had made new friends or met new people in the gardening club and all except one participant indicated they had learnt new skills with the garden club. When asked how working in the garden makes them feel, the participants mentioned happiness, enjoyment and feeling relaxed.

The participants were asked how the garden club could be improved or developed and made suggestions about the need to get more learners involved and the need to have one or two students to supervise the project.

When interviewed in 2006, the Centre staff were pleased that it had started to feel that a little part of the park was theirs and the Centre had grown out of the building. Having an outside area was so important in their view and connected people with their previous lives. The volunteer was seen by the staff as having good cross over skills and was much valued by the ESOL staff, and the learners particularly enjoyed the two trips out of the Centre.

Now in 2007, the staff have seen definite gains for the learners who have taken part, many of which are linked to the work done by the volunteer and the way in which she got involved with people and in their lives. However, the handing on of gardening skills was not substantial, and because the plots
involved were in public spaces the participants did not feel they owned them. Their engagement times were limited and often they were tired and taken up with learning. They clearly enjoyed being outside and taking part but they did not control the space in the way they might have with an allotment, though their views have influenced plans for the park.

This partnership created a much better relationship between Islington Council and the Centre. Without the connections made through the project, the ESOL students would not have been involved in the park consultation in such depth, and the Council are hoping that the centre users will continue to be involved in the process.

The staff feel they have learnt a lot about gardening work and how complicated the relationships are with the various organisations involved in the park. They recognise what a lot of work was involved and how motivated the volunteer was. Though the Centre values the project – ‘we will miss the project when we don’t have it’ – they are fighting to keep their current programme going, and do not feel they could manage another volunteer for this work. The volunteer had limited time for the project while a more regular input was needed to support and build up a group. In all this there was a tension between getting the plots looking reasonable and having something to show, and the need to really engage the Centre learners.

“When asked what they liked about the garden club, the participants noted both learning about gardening, the enjoyment of achievement and happiness at working with plants, and being with friends.”
“We belong here because we are here. We live here, so we are English. It is as simple as that.”

6. Food Growing at the Calthorpe Project

The Calthorpe Project is a multi-use space with a community garden in the Kings Cross area of London. It runs a range of activities for the diverse communities in the local area.

The Garden was set up in 1984 after local people fought to save the land from development. There is little other green space in the immediate area. Around 30,000 people a year use the gardens and community centre in one way or another.

Work with BTCV

Calthorpe has an ongoing relationship with BTCV, developed through a series of partnership projects over many years. They run their own programmes while making use of the various support services offered by BTCV. The project also sees BTCV as a resource in terms of expert guidance, the availability of BTCV volunteers that may be called upon to support its work, and funding that it has acquired through funding schemes such as the People’s Places programme and EfA.

A group of around 20 older women of Bangladeshi origin, nearly all grandmothers, come to the Project regularly to tend small plots (around 4 feet by 6 feet) within the grounds. They grow various vegetables and herbs and a few flowers. They choose to call everything they do ‘gardening’ although it is mainly food growing.

This group has been going informally for some years, anchored on the fact that the plots are there for their use. They also use the greenhouse (built with funds from the BTCV People’s Places scheme). The development of the greenhouse followed consultation with users (the Bangladeshi women were involved in this) resulting in an appropriate facility for the community. The construction was used as an opportunity to train members of the community in basic building skills.
The women come and go as individuals, interacting with whoever happens to be present when they come in to water or tend to their plot. Rina, the project manager, works to enable them to feel more like a group, encouraging them in mutual support activities such doing something else's watering if they see that their plots are dry and they have not come in. They now also sign in so that she can see the trend of their attendance. She has organised group activities such as cooking sessions with recipe and skill sharing, and introduced them to non-Asian recipes that allow them to talk about new ingredients and ways of cooking, including consideration of using less fat, building awareness about food, ingredients and better health.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the project was done through a participatory workshop using a format developed out of the outcomes of the Saanjhi report. Eight of the women took part. While they speak and understand some English, they felt they wanted the workshop to be conducted in their own language. Rina speaks their language and undertook the interpretation. The workshop covered a range of issues, not least their relationship to their urban environment:

“We have never been to the countryside, but we are not frustrated and unhappy not to have everything that life can offer. We come from a village. We never went anywhere then. It is okay that we do not go anywhere now. It would of course be great, but it is not something we worry about if we do not get these opportunities. We have our family. Our grandchildren fill our lives. They are important to us. It would be great to go to the countryside or do other things together with the children.”

“We have never been out to the countryside. We do not dwell on it. Living in London and not going anywhere is what we accept. You have to be realistic and make the best of what is real and possible and give up what we cannot have. Concentrate on good things.”

They are also very clear about their identity.

“Of course we are British. How can we not be since we live here? That is it. What other people think we should be is their business.”
“We belong here because we are here. We live here, so we are English. It is as simple as that.”
(Nods all round) “Yes, that is a good answer.”

They really enjoy “gardening” (food growing in the main) and want to have better conditions and do more. They feel that the activity outside is good for their health, and say that the fresh produce also contributes to their health. The pleasure of fresh produce that is part of their cultural cuisine is significant to them. They love being outside, and are very sensitive to the beauty of their plants. “Look at their leaves, the colour, the pattern. So beautiful plants are.”

They have found the new greenhouse very useful, and enjoy meeting other groups using it, but wish that there could be heating to extend the season. They would also like raised beds to make their work easier, and a source of water that is closer to their beds.

The outcomes of the work.

Of all the ‘projects’ evaluated, this is the one that is most unlike a project as it is ongoing. It can be seen as a model for a sustainable project. It has no priority targets or finish dates. It is a group of women with a shared interest and a long-term commitment to come together within a shared space, helping each other, learning new knowledge and skills, and gaining a lot from social interaction. What they have learnt benefits their quality of life, regular exercise has health benefits, and they contribute to the environmental change through actions such as composting. Their love of nature and contact with it through growing food and flowers is central.

It is a confident group, settled into lives that may seem limited for some of us, especially the younger generation. They exercise cultural qualities of acceptance typical of their generation and background. These qualities contribute to their well-being.
Part 3: The evaluation processes

All these cases have emerged from an evaluation process. In every case the collaborative research work has been central to that process. In some cases it is this work that has provided the space for reflection and learning from what might otherwise have been superficially seen as unexceptional activities.

Every project needs and deserves assessment and an evaluation of what has been learnt and the impacts achieved. Those impacts may include environmental and social impacts, but might also usefully include health impacts and impacts on the wider community. All too often any assessment is done at the end (when it is too late to incorporate any lessons) and only really focuses on monitoring whether targets have been met and outputs delivered.

The key processes used in these cases include:

- Someone actively involved within the community served by the project is trained to do evaluation work.
  This was done for the Saanjhi project, where Balbir, a worker at the Centre, was trained up and contributed the full report on this project. Her constant presence enabled her to develop close links with the participants and draw out the personal statements that show the impact of this programme.

- The evaluation work is led or supported by the project worker with active involvement of the participants.
  This was the main way in which evaluation was done for Blaenau Gwent, Belfast, and Islington. This requires skill and mindfulness on the part of the project worker. It also opens up the possibility for the evaluation to be an ongoing interactive process taking place alongside the day-to-day work. This was important in Belfast where it would have been very difficult and probably unhelpful to engage the children in a formal discussion setting.

- Participants are involved in a facilitated discussion workshop, led either by a project worker or by an outside evaluator.
  Glasgow and Calthorpe are examples of where an outside evaluator came in to run the workshop, but such workshops were also an integral part of the evaluation at Saanjhi (where much of the key methodology was developed by BEN) and at Blaenau Gwent, where the local Primary School was also involved.
• Direct one-to-one interviews with project participants.
In some smaller projects simply drawing everyone together for a discussion may be difficult. This proved to be the case in Islington, where the project volunteer wrote a reflective report and worked with one of the group members to interview others, with the Evaluation Trust worker undertaking some interviews of wider stakeholders.

• Using events to develop an assessment of the wider impact of the project.
This took place in Blaenau Gwent and in Belfast, where the inter-community celebration was both a key point in the project’s growth and also a chance for some discussion and reflection.

• Using an external evaluator who understands the aims of the project.
The Belfast project started with an external community development worker being asked to do the evaluation, which involved building close links with the children involved. When this person had to move on, the work was carried on by CVNI staff.

These are mostly small projects, but in certain projects, their smallness had been the basis for their impact on the participants’ lives. The assessment process has inevitably had to be informal and responsive to participants’ needs and capacities. The external researcher had to build trust and rapport and where possible become ‘part of the scenery’ as well as acting as a key resource and support to the local evaluators.

Many of those involved were short of time and most would not have been willing or able to be part of very formal evaluation with survey forms and quantifiable data. That does not mean that the evaluation did not play an important role.

The research shows that given time and flexibility, during which an external researcher can establish a working relationship with a group, participatory evaluation by members of the project group can spread the work out as necessary and deliver valuable insights. It also gives those involved a chance to reflect and comment on what has been done in a way that is not possible through working solely with external researchers.

It is perhaps the case that some external evaluators would suggest that there is little hard objective assessment in these cases but that is to miss the point. The aim of this work was to find out what had happened, especially to those who participated, rather than establishing whether a project was ‘a success’, was value for money, or was meeting its agreed output targets. That work clearly has value in the appropriate circumstances but it is also important to go beyond such basic measures of success if one is to genuinely understand the outcomes and impacts.

This shows that there are many ways in which evaluation and assessment can be done while still involving the participants in the project. The ideal of training a community researcher from within a project, in order to enable ongoing evaluative work is not always possible, and the range of participatory techniques and support used in this piece of research goes some way to identifying how more information can be captured. One example was the participatory evaluation format developed by BEN. This used story-telling (focused on what had happened to others) to encourage the revealing of feelings and personal stories by the workshop participants. Another was the work of the key volunteer in the Green Gym who helped identify the questions to be asked and interviewed other participants both individually and in a focus group, as well as taking feedback from some partner groups like the schools.
Part 4: Making an impact?

Normally it is major events that really ‘make an impact’ – sporting triumphs, political scandals or natural disasters. Community-based projects don’t tend to make that kind of impact.

But simply because an impact is not obvious does not mean it’s not there. Recent work by Bassac and the Community Alliance suggests that an effective community-based project can have an impact on the lives of those involved in many ways. It can:

- provide direct support by offering activities and training that help build peoples’ skills and confidence;
- provide indirect support by encouraging other organisations to make sure good services are available to local people;
- improve the local economy by helping create jobs, training and new opportunities;
- improve the local environment by tackling problems and engaging people in planning the changes they’d like to see;
- act as an advocate working with the people involved to improve their well-being and quality of life.

The direct environmental and economic impacts of the six projects reviewed for this work are clearly limited. However the personal, social and less direct impacts are both significant and wide ranging. They are revealed by the work that was done to get the personal insights and developments either through the eyes of participants as community researchers or through external researchers taking the time to build relationships in which people are trusting and confident to share their feelings.

Only the Blaenau Gwent Green Gym is likely to have even been visible to anyone not closely involved with the lives of the participants. But the evidence of this research is that such projects are clearly having a social impact. In the first instance, that impact is primarily on the participants, but it goes beyond personal benefit to enable those people to take some first steps to engaging with their communities in wholly new ways. For people from disadvantaged groups suffering from the lack of equal opportunity, these first steps represent significant new opportunities within their lives.

Direct impacts may also have indirect outcomes: if those involved acquire skills and confidence that help them get jobs then they and our wider society benefit. If engagement with their environment leads even a few people with...
mental health problems to feel confident about moving from a centre such as Saanjjhi to live independent lives, then that creates space that other people may badly need. Underlying all this is the value of collective social and environmental action in building social identity within individuals and cohesion within communities. These stories speak of people able to both give and receive, where the activities have given them opportunities to find a place in the community that allows them to move away from focusing on their difficulties and isolation towards positive contribution and integration.

Most well-managed environmental projects are likely to be having such indirect social benefits. Work by the Community Development Foundation\(^3\) has shown that the social and economic benefits of such projects are often more significant than the immediate environmental benefits but that these are rarely assessed.

There are obvious reasons for that. Assessing outcomes and impacts is often seen simplistically as an imprecise art. It is a long-term exercise with complex multi-dimensional aspects, and to develop real clarity requires the application of specific skills and a commitment of time and resources. Funders are often not prepared to fund such assessments and project staff and managers may be looking to move on to other work.

There is a developing body of good practice in participatory impact assessment, but it is still scattered across the voluntary and community sector.\(^5\) Much of this work is more focused on health, housing and social development rather than quality of life, environmental change or the development of social identity and there is little recognition of the impacts and wider benefits of linking the social and the environmental.

There is an increasingly urgent need for change. The need to transform energy use and environmental behaviours in this country and world-wide as a result of dangerously imminent climate change means that environmental activity will need to link into all forms of local activity. If social, health or educational agencies are going to take on environmental activities and targets then they are quite justifiably going to want to know how this will benefit their ‘core business’. If those promoting environmental change want to move further in to the mainstream, then they will need the techniques to demonstrate the wider benefits of those changes.

It is perhaps the case that a culture change is necessary and EfA may be pointing the way. There is a need for:

- Increased understanding of the benefits of linking social development and environmental activity (which is at the core of sustainable development) among those working in both fields;
- An increased commitment to assessment and learning from what has been done and to building this reflective practice into all project work;
- The tracking of change and development in communities beyond time-limited projects.

This in turn has implications for current practice at every level. Managers need to focus on building learning within their organisations and to create the space and resources for better assessment work. Project staff are the interface between the organisation and the communities they are working with but need also to have the time to step back from this role and to consider how they work and how they learn from what they do. They need to purposefully build the skills of community groups and project participants to engage with such work. Funding agencies, local authorities and regeneration partnerships all need to commit to the idea that better practice involves learning from what has gone before and to make resources available to that end.

There may be a need for new relationships to be built. Evaluation and assessment needs time, rigour and objectivity if it is to be done well. This project linked BTCV with the Black Environment Network and the Evaluation Trust, all of whom bought different skills and perspectives to the work. The action-based research techniques demonstrated by this research project complement academic research approaches, where time and resources are often more readily available for detailed assessment. It may well be that more programmes need to build links with other agencies so that they can work more closely together to make more of each others’ strengths.
The role of the ‘community environment worker’

Organisations such as BTCV, City Farms and Groundwork Trusts have, over the past decade, developed a new kind of worker, part environmental project developer and part community development practitioner. This development has been in part a response to circumstance as environmental work becomes linked to other sector themes such as regeneration and partly a planned strategic process. EFAS and the recent Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG in England) ‘Living Spaces’ programmes are examples of programmes that have specifically addressed the ‘neglected interface’ between social and environmental development. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that significant numbers of staff coming in to work on environmental projects have had some experience of global development work through Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) and other initiatives and may have been influenced by practitioners such as Robert Chambers (of the Institute for Development Studies) who has always stressed the need to give control of local projects to those communities where they are based.

Yet such staff are often poorly paid and on short-term contracts. The Islington project relied on a volunteer, supervised by a BTCV worker whose funding then ceased. Managers who have not had direct experience of working in excluded communities may not understand the problems being dealt with, and there are very real issues over how such work is evaluated. Managers who have not had direct experience of working in excluded communities may not understand the problems being dealt with, and there are very real issues over how such work is evaluated. One manager criticised a community worker for ‘spending all his time having cups of tea with people’, not seeing that for that worker to be invited in for a cup of tea might be an important stage in a trust-building process. It is arguable that the number of cups of tea could be used as a success indicator in this work.

The next section makes some recommendations on how this work area can best be developed.

Towards exemplary practice

Work done during the evaluation of the Blaenau Gwent programme highlighted the critical importance of the community environment project worker – something echoed in all the other projects. Their work leads to a set of guidelines to which an ‘exemplary worker’ might aspire:

- The worker is able to work at different levels with individuals, community organisations, other agencies and communities at large to achieve environmental, health and social justice gains.
- She/he recognises that this demands a willingness to engage over a long period of time, building relationships and trust with groups and with people, and that there is an art in recognising and realising opportunities for creative work combining environment with health or other issues.
- She/he will have taken the time to develop an understanding of the way of life of those involved in any specific project and will be able to empathise over the problems they face.
- Her/his skills lie in focusing on the environment and the work in hand rather than on the distinguishing attributes or disabilities of individuals, whilst meeting those individual needs with awareness and sensitivity, and giving space for people to develop in their own way.
- She/he organises individual work programmes within a larger project to match people’s strengths, skills, abilities and aspirations while also ensuring that day-to-day activities are run in ways appropriate to the needs of all those involved;
- She/he helps people feel competent, confident and valued through agreeing and accomplishing tasks, through giving praise and recognition, and through encouraging those involved to take the initiative to find the best ways to continue to access learning opportunities and build their social and practical skills.
- She/he actively encourages participants to take ownership of the environmental work, framing it within their own life and identity.
…engaging with their environment has an important role to play in helping people to build identity, self-esteem and confidence.

Part 5: People, communities and their environments – lessons for better practice

The studies done for this report suggest that engaging with their environment has an important role to play in helping people to build identity, self-esteem and confidence. For members of disadvantaged groups, it is often these fundamentals that, combined with new knowledge, practical skills and social connections, enable people to take their future into their own hands, taking the first step to re-integrate themselves into their community. This can be done in many ways depending on local circumstances. There are likely to be environmental benefits but the more significant ones may be for health and social development. Maximising both types of benefits requires careful planning.

Tackling prejudice and misconception

These projects worked with people with serious mental health problems, with learning difficulties, with Travellers, with the long-term unemployed and with asylum seekers. These are the people who routinely face the most serious prejudice and exclusion within our society and who may feel alienated from their surroundings.

Some of this work suggests that it is possible to change the perceptions of those who have no understanding of the roots of prejudice and social exclusion of or people with a different way of life. Media, exaggerated stories and urban myths highlight the differences between communities. People are often divided by misunderstanding of other cultures even though they share common problems. The Belfast project has made a concerted attempt to bring together Travellers and the settled communities they live next to and have seen many of those involved change their attitudes. Misconceptions exist at every level. The asylum seekers in Islington initially expressed concern about engaging with the group they portrayed as ‘the drinkers’ in the park where they worked. Even among the excluded some are perhaps ‘more excluded than others’, but the connections made between these groups by the project showed that bridges can be built even in difficult situations.

Any and every practitioner has their own socio-cultural background which may give rise to misconception and even subconscious prejudice. It is critical for work in this area that managers ensure that staff get the support and training they need to get clear on their own issues and viewpoints and to learn to work effectively across and between different social groups, communities and cultures.
Recognising the problems of working within exclusion and alienation

Those who have faced consistently high levels of discrimination may well be sceptical about lending their support to any project seeking to involve them, their children or the area they live in. The Belfast project showed how Travellers in particular have a general apathy towards statutory agencies, whom they feel have consistently let them down in the past. Other excluded groups are likely to have similar feelings about working with organisations that they see as contributing to their problems.

There is of course no easy answer for any project worker but there are some pointers to success. Training to have the knowledge and skills needed is fundamental. Doing good preparatory work is critical: any project worker needs to take the time to learn about and understand the people and communities with whom involvement is sought. It will be important to work with other agencies who may already be working with the target groups, but it is equally important to develop contacts with the people with whom involvement is sought on an informal basis. It is important that their needs are recognised and dealt with in a compassionate and supportive manner.

Working within the constraints set by a community

Communities and individuals suffering financial and social exclusion face a range of problems that will impact on their ability to get engaged. Some may be specific to a community or group, as with the ladies at Saanjhi or the Travellers leaving the area where they were based for several weeks. Others are more commonplace – lack of access to transport (a problem for some of the Green Gym volunteers) or a shortage of money which means that paying for childcare may not be an option and that imposes many restrictions on women responsible for small children.

Understanding these issues is one step, but seeking to design and manage the project to work within such constraints is another step. Given that such constraints often only become clear as the project gets moving, this can often be problematic but the need for flexibility in delivery is an important success factor.

Continuity

With short term funding the norm, a change in staff working on a project is a familiar challenge faced by community projects. It is particularly important to address this particular problem when working with relatively fragile groups on projects linking social and environmental goals. The lack of consistent support over a sufficient period of time adds to the difficulties of supporting these groups so that they become effective and independent.

Belfast and Islington both suffered from this problem. The answer in the long-term can perhaps be seen at the Calthorpe Project where the work evaluated is largely self-managed by the participants and is resourced by a robust and well established community based organisation. However building up to this takes time and planning for continuity and good handovers remains critical.

Participants also move on, and sometimes what may be interpreted as a failing ‘disintegrating group’ may actually be individuals integrating themselves into their community through the new capacity, confidence and vision that has resulted from coming temporarily into a fluid social space of environmental volunteering.

Building in opportunities for reflection and discussion

It is not easy at the start of a project, especially one working with a community that has had little engagement with such work before, to predict just how the project will run or how and when it will be appropriate to do some informal evaluation work. But most of the participants and community researchers who took part in the work that formed the core of this research were very positive about having the chance to have their say. In terms of being seen to value participants, asking and recording their opinions is a good way to show that they are valued. Making time to discuss how a project has worked will also provide an opportunity to build understanding of the social context for the project and for participants to learn from each other. The sharing of personal stories builds trust, deepens understanding, and promotes social bonding.
Time and resources
All these recommendations are about making time, developing skills and using tools for building understanding and for learning and reflection, yet time is often a scarce resource for small projects.

Giving participants skills as a front loaded investment can pay dividends and once in place, can have their own developmental momentum, just as environmental volunteers with their critical mass of knowledge and skills have a continuing momentum of their own as a cost-free contribution to society. Staff time (and the time of external researchers) needs to be paid for in some way, and ensuring that any project budget includes sufficient time and money for learning and evaluation is perhaps the key lesson from this work.

Environments for All played an important role in making funding available for small projects with excluded communities. Yet this funding was not open-ended. Three of the projects in this report cannot continue without further support and others rely on voluntary engagement. Indeed voluntary input was common to all, with some run by volunteers and others with paid staff beyond their normal roles to make these projects successful.

The evaluation and research work was more time consuming than expected. Working with people who themselves were short of time or had mental health issues poses quite different problems to evaluating work done by professionals. If the evaluator is to understand the project, they also need to understand the circumstances of those involved. This can be a problem for those with a rigid world view and the ability to empathise and adapt accordingly is critical.

Of the projects reviewed, the ones that have a viable future are those that are low-cost and self-managing (Calthorpe Gardens) or those that have managed to embed themselves firmly within the wider community (Belfast, Glasgow and Blaenau) and can thus possibly attract funding from social development funds. There must however be the recognition that some very needy groups within society will need ongoing funding ring-fenced for them. Funding good evaluation will also require careful planning and looking to bring in resources from other sectors that may also benefit from the evaluation.

Managing projects to maximise impacts
The challenge is therefore perhaps more for the funders and managers than it is for the project workers and volunteers. If an environmental project is genuinely to help build skills and tackle exclusion then it needs to build in time for staff to build an understanding of the local situation. The staff need to develop good personal links with the community they are seeking to involve, to have an evaluation system that can engage that community, along with measures, indicators and tools that reflect their needs and concerns. All this suggests a need to look at how such projects are planned, budgeted and delivered. There is also a need for funders to recognise that outcomes and impacts may not be so easily assessed or measured and that if a project is to be genuinely community-led then success measures will need to be developed with that community once the project has started. In many cases the most significant outcomes may be longer term and not be visible within the timescale of the projects.

Engagement with the policy agenda
Much of this report is about work at the most local level. Yet the issues arising from this work have implications for some key government policy areas:

• **Access to green space.** The Countryside Agency Diversity review showed that access to green space and countryside is a problem for BME communities – not least because of limited outreach and understanding from environmental organisations. This work shows that this need not be the case, and that there are clear benefits to society from developing that access.

• **Health and well-being.** There is an increasing body of evidence showing that engagement with nature can help to tackle obesity, heart disease and mental ill health. This report has allowed individuals to say in their own words how they have experienced personal health and well being benefits.

• **Integration and cohesion.** The report shows how concerns over segregated cultures and communities can be answered in part through environmental activities that offer people common purpose and a means of exploring shared values. One participant said:

> “For us, where would one really get a real experience of what asylum seekers are like? My dad has very narrow views. This group has allowed me to get to know them as people and find out they are nothing like what you read in the paper. It has been very important to me to discover this. I now really want society to support asylum seekers and understand and address the problems we create for them.”
In conclusion: towards a socio-environmental identity

Environments for All has changed how BTCV works with communities. It is currently less clear how far this work has changed the communities and the people who have taken part in it. These case studies only offer limited evidence, but the results show a strong commonality in terms of the value of people-centred environmental action as a way to build individuals’ identity, confidence and self-esteem. The challenge arising from this work is to use a socio-environmental approach to connect excluded social groups and disadvantaged communities with the natural environment and to do this in ways that helps build that identity and maximises both the social and environmental impacts.

Encouraging and enabling people and communities to see caring for the environment as a central part of who they are is an important aspect of building support for the major environmental and social changes that we need to deliver over the next decade. If this is done well then there will be truly sustainable development and the energy within those communities will be a powerful force for environmental action.

“The challenge arising from this work is to use a socio-environmental approach to connect excluded social groups and disadvantaged communities with the natural environment...”
References

The following reports are referred to in the text:

1. Globalism, Localism, and Identity (O’Riordan et al., Earthscan 2001)
4. Environments for All: The BTCV guide for community action (BTCV 2005)

Further relevant reading on diversity, access and health


Further relevant reading on impacts and evaluation:

- Evaluating Community Projects – A Practical Guide. This simple 12-page guide was developed by a Joseph Rowntree Foundation project working with 20 local organisations. It is free to download from www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/1859354157.pdf
- ChangeCheck – a practical guide to assessing the impact of your community centre. This Bassac guide is aimed at community centres but has much useful materials on impacts. www.bassac.org
- First Steps in Monitoring and Evaluation. This Charities Evaluation Services guide helps any organisation set out its aims and objectives and the indicators that will measure success, and then moves on to monitoring and evaluation. It is free to download from www.ces-vol.org.uk/downloads/firstmande-15-21.pdf
- Prove It! This evaluation toolkit helps organisations capture their impact on the quality of life of the communities they serve. It aims to help organisations measure effects of their work on building social capital. It is free to download from: www.neweconomics.org/gen/uploads/ProveIt%201.pdf
- Your Project and its Outcomes. This 24-page guide explains clearly how to assess the outcomes of your work, looks at how you can set them out in the first place and provides a lot of useful help on measuring progress. It was produced CES for the Big Lottery Fund. It is free to download from www.ces-vol.org.uk/downloads/yourproject-17-23.pdf
- The Evaluation Trust’s web site includes a range of tools and case studies: www.evaluationtrust.org
# Appendix

Matrix 1: Evaluation of the Calthorpe Project: Participatory Workshop

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A1. Activities Sanjib has done with BCTV</th>
<th>Calthorpe Project</th>
<th>London</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The acquisition of allotment for 'tea'</td>
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<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to grow and plants</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A visit to a botanical garden</td>
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<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A residential orchard</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A trip to an organic farm</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artcraft activities</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A trip to the Wedgewood factory to watch</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and take part in a pottery workshop to create their own pieces</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-environmental activities</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A canal boat trip</td>
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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultation about what we want in the greenhouse</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the greenhouse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about tools</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B. What the Sanjib group wants to do in the future</th>
<th>Calthorpe Project</th>
<th>London</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring other different sequences in the countryside</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities with nature, wildlife</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welting in different settings</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artcraft activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art and other activities designed to build confidence with</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being with other social groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-environmental activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to museums and art galleries</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trip to the seaside</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to Disney World</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to Sea World</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train journeys (as a team and not as a whole)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trip back</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trip to cinema</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B2. Other things I want to do in the future</th>
<th>Calthorpe Project</th>
<th>London</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to somewhere natural and beautiful</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities during the weekend or school holidays</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See places from our country of origin in botanic gardens</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to organic gardens</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go out camping to feel rooted to our country of origin</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to our relatives did have and it sounds good</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities that different age groups learn about many different things</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to bert gardens</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring and building cultural identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities that link skills we have learnt in our country</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-environmental activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go on a canal boat</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to somewhere beautiful and not our countryside</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to France - one of our relatives did have and it sounds good</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Matrix 1 - An Overview of ETCV Activities

#### What groups have done and what else they would like to do

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A1. Activities Sannjhi has done with ETCV</th>
<th>Samjhi Birmingham</th>
<th>ETCV Gardening Group Glasgow</th>
<th>Calhorpse Project London</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The acquisition of an allotment for the 'ladies' to grow vegetables and plants</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A visit to a botanical garden</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A residential countryside trip</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A trip to an organic farm</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Art/craft activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A trip to the Wedgewood factory to watch craftsmen at work and take part in a pottery workshop to create their own pieces</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-environmental activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A canal boat trip</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A2. Other Activities I have done with ETCV</th>
<th>BTCV Gardening Group Glasgow</th>
<th>Calhorpse Project London</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening course (planting seeds, taking care of plants at different stages, using tools, preparation of soil, grasstcutting etc)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to a garden centre</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to a different allotment to see how it was run</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building raised beds</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working outside of Glasgow</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation about what we want re the greenhouse</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the greenhouse</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about tools</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### B1. What the Sannjhi group wants to do in the future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B1. What the Sannjhi group wants to do in the future</th>
<th>Samjhi Birmingham</th>
<th>BTCV Gardening Group Glasgow</th>
<th>Calhorpse Project London</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>countryside</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities with nature/wildlife</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking in different settings</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exploring/sharing cultural identity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits that explore British culture and traditions</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Art/craft activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art and other activities designed to build confidence with being with other social groups</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-environmental activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits to museums and art galleries</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trip to the seaside</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to Sea World</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to London</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun days</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trip to the cinema</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental activities</td>
<td>BTG Group</td>
<td>CAT Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outings to anywhere natural and beautiful</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities during the weekend or school holidays because of responsibilities for children's gardens</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BBQ in the countryside with our children</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feather picking in the countryside</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visit to an organic garden farm</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Countryside/nature...one of our relatives did that and it sounds really good</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities that let different age groups learn about many different things</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visit to herb gardens</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A BTGV kids' club for single dads would be good</strong></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exploring/sharing cultural identity</th>
<th>BTG Group</th>
<th>CAT Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities that have a cultural dimension relating to our country of origin so it links to cultural pride for our grandchildren</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Taking our children to the forest to celebrate Congo Independence Day</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skill share and exchange between cultures</strong></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Art/craft activities</th>
<th>BTG Group</th>
<th>CAT Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Art with recycled materials</strong></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Music with a group</strong></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Be creative using recycled materials</strong></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Be creative using recycled materials</strong></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Catering in Canadian cuisine</strong></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arts activities that link to skills we have learnt in our country</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>90%</td>
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</table>
Matrix 3: Analysis of the Saanjhi, Glasgow Gardening and Calthorpe Projects: Social Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Old</th>
<th>New</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category 1</td>
<td>Old Value</td>
<td>New Value</td>
<td>Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 2</td>
<td>Old Value</td>
<td>New Value</td>
<td>Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 3</td>
<td>Old Value</td>
<td>New Value</td>
<td>Change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continued overleaf...