



Outdoors Active and Well

Final Project Evaluation Report

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A summary version of this report is available. There is also a separate Annex, entitled *What Works*, compiled by beneficiaries who took part in the project.

Section 1: Introduction

1.1. Project Background

This report provides a final evaluation of Outdoors Active and Well (OAW), a project run jointly by three delivery partners: Leeds Mind, The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) at Hollybush, and Hyde Park Source (HPS). Information in this report covers the three years of the project, from June 2016 to the end of May 2019. Quantitative data covers the period just up to February 2019; no evaluation data collection was undertaken at the end of May 2019 as it was not feasible to collect feedback at the very end of the project. Within the text, some of this data is broken down by each project year. For convenience a summary of all data relating to Year 3 only is brought together at Appendix 1, although again this covers only the period up to the end of February 2019.

The OAW project was funded by Big Lottery, and aimed to address issues of poor health (mental and physical), lack of confidence, social isolation, and difficulty with progression into employment, in the Leeds area. It did this through a combination of initiatives provided by the delivery partners:

- TCV and HPS ran outdoor activities including gardening, permaculture and walking groups aimed at providing physical exercise as well as developing social networks and improved confidence. These groups were open-ended, with no time limit on beneficiaries' participation.
- Leeds Mind ran peer support groups in which group members shared practical and life skills, intended to improve mental wellbeing and in some cases enhance their employability prospects. These were initially intended as short courses drawing members from the TCV and HPS groups. In the light of experience however, this developed into an extensive programme of events and social activities. These included a mindfulness group, social outings, informal training and peer support discussions suggested by beneficiaries.

The planned project outcomes were:

- People will increase their participation in community environmental activities, leading to improvements in physical and mental health
- Local people will experience reduced social isolation by developing social networks through environmental activities
- People will engage in community-based environmental activities, leading to improved confidence and resilience
- Through participating in community-based environmental activities, people will access employability support, increasing their practical and life skills

Whilst employment might be an ultimate goal for some beneficiaries, project aims were based on people feeling more employable and able to work – actual return to work was not a specific target.

The three partner organisations all ran (and continue) other activities in addition to OAW:

Leeds Mind was the lead partner for OAW, and is an independent charity affiliated to the national Mind group. It offers a range of services aimed at promoting positive mental health and wellbeing to those who need support. These services include counselling, group therapy, social support, peer support, self-directed support, social prescribing, housing support, employment support, suicide bereavement support, and mental health training.

The Conservation Volunteers' (TCV) Hollybush site in Kirkstall, Leeds is a well-established environmental volunteering centre that has been running for over 30 years. It is one of two TCV sites in Leeds, and part of a national network that aims to create happier and healthier communities, through activities that help to manage green spaces and improve the environment. It encourages people to contribute and socialise in an outdoor setting, to benefit their emotional, physical and social well-being as well as the local environment.

Based in the Hyde Park area of Leeds, **Hyde Park Source** (HPS) has been delivering community projects for over 20 years, and now operates across the city. It works with local people and volunteers to improve their surroundings and create attractive, exciting, safe and useful places for people to live, work and play. It collaborates with local groups and organisations where possible, and specialises in training, workshops and activities on permaculture.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY: Throughout this report, the term 'beneficiary' refers to people who used any of the services from Leeds Mind, HPS or TCV which formed part of the OAW project. Some of these beneficiaries may also have been 'volunteers', which means that they were appointed (unpaid) to assist paid staff from the organisations who run activities or courses.

1.2. Evaluation Methods

Throughout the project, the three partner organisations gathered evaluation data. This was supported by an independent consultant (Andy Bagley of Real-Improvement) who analysed the quantitative data and conducted independent interviews. The information in this report draws together data from a range of different sources:

- A confidential database managed by Leeds Mind acted as a central store for data gathered by all three partner organisations. This included personal information on each beneficiary, which groups and sessions they attended, and how they moved on from these groups (where known). It also recorded evaluation returns (see below), and enabled all of this data to be analysed.
- Evaluation Forms gathered from beneficiaries who attended each of the project groups, courses or events. These forms were collected quarterly from people attending the TCV and HPS groups, and at the end of each formal course for those attending Leeds Mind-led activities (mainly in the project's early stages). This form is reproduced at Appendix 2 to this report.
- Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (SWEMWBS). This widely-recognised measure asks people to rate themselves on a 1 to 5 scale on seven questions about their overall happiness and wellbeing. OAW beneficiaries completed an initial 'baseline' form when they first joined the project, and subsequent forms each quarter. The SWEMWBS questions and rating scales are shown at Appendix 2.
- Qualitative feedback from beneficiary interviews. These were 1:1 interviews undertaken by the consultant (see Section 1.3) with beneficiaries who attended OAW activities or courses. Over the first two years of the project, the consultant interviewed a total of 38 beneficiaries, including participants from all of the groups run by TCV, HPS and Leeds Mind, and spoke informally to many more.

- Feedback from third parties. The consultant also interviewed 14 representatives from external organisations (some more than once) – either referrers to OAW, or other groups with which the project had links.
- Other feedback – formal or informal – gathered by group facilitators/leaders. Some of this came from locally-produced forms these groups used or case studies they produced, and some from discussions with the consultant to amplify and interpret data from other sources.
- Group representatives: in 2018, Leeds Mind initiated a ‘Reps Group’ that brought together people from all of the OAW gardening and walking groups, as a source of feedback and further development ideas. Near the end of the project, Leeds Mind also brought together a small group to gather further learning from OAW as a whole. Their report, entitled *What Works*, is reproduced as an annex to this report.

This report captures information from all these data sources. In addition, project monitoring returns to Big Lottery have been compiled by Leeds Mind. These report project activities and participant numbers, together with achievement against the project’s planned outcomes.

The quarterly-based feedback arrangements meant that it was not possible to collect comprehensive data from everyone – for example where people dropped out from groups after a short time. However, the overall amount of data gathered, together with qualitative feedback, means that this report can draw robust conclusions on beneficiaries’ progress and other outcomes achieved.

1.3. Acknowledgements and Thanks

This report has been written by Andy Bagley of Real-Improvement, an independent consultant specialising in evaluation and impact measurement for charities and other third sector organisations. It has been prepared with a great deal of assistance from staff, volunteers and beneficiaries from all three partners, together with input from external organisations. Project staff gathered survey data and contributed their ideas and feedback on progress; Leeds Mind also managed the OAW database which collated all the survey and management information for the project. Volunteers and beneficiaries have very willingly given their time, together with very honest accounts of their experiences, through interviews.

Andy would like to thank everyone involved; HPS, TCV and Leeds Mind staff, volunteers and beneficiaries, and external organisations, who have contributed their work, experience and information to this report.

Section 2: Activities and Outputs

Overall progress of the OAW project, including feedback on expected outcomes, will be reported to Big Lottery with the monitoring return to May 2019. This section summarises, for context purposes, the groups that were running by Year 3 of the project.

2.1. HPS and TCV

HPS and TCV ran outdoor activity groups continuously from Summer 2016. These groups ran weekly on different days and locations. There were a few changes to locations and times as new and more suitable opportunities became available, although most groups ran consistently at the same locations throughout. The groups running by the project's third year were (numbers in brackets indicate average beneficiary attendance – these figures are approximate and varied each week):

HPS: (gardening and permaculture)

Tuesday p.m. – Hyde Park allotment ('The Lost Plot') (12-15 people)

Thursday a.m. – Cross Green Community Garden* (12-15 people)

Thursday p.m. – Armley Mills Museum garden (12-15 people)

Friday a.m. – Bedford Fields, Woodhouse (10-15 people)

Friday p.m. – St Mary's Community Garden, Chapeltown (5-10 people)

*This group is partly run by Cross Green Community Group. Whilst still part of OAW, HPS staff did not attend every week.

TCV:

Monday p.m. – walking group (8-11 people)

Tuesday p.m. – gardening group at Hollybush (10-13 people)

Wednesday p.m. – gardening group at Hollybush (10-14 people)

Thursday a.m. – gardening group at Oakwood Hall (8-12 people)

In the project's first two years, some people were members of more than one group, hence the total number of beneficiaries at any one time was slightly less than the total membership of all groups. This was curtailed in the project's later stages, partly to avoid beneficiaries becoming over-dependent on OAW, and partly to ensure that the groups had space for new people to join. In practice, not everyone was able to attend their group every week, so the total number of 'active' OAW beneficiaries was always greater than the total of average attendances shown above.

In all cases these activities aimed to encourage physical exercise, reduce social isolation and increase beneficiaries' confidence and self-esteem. This in turn was intended to help those with a realistic prospect of future employment to take further steps towards that goal. Generally, beneficiaries tended to stay either with HPS or with TCV groups; although there was some limited interchange between the two.

OAW funding also included a contribution to building The Roundhouse, a new wooden building at TCV's Hollybush site designed for meetings and groups activities. This proved to be an invaluable asset to OAW gardening groups there, providing an excellent environment for discussions and breaks (they previously had to use a gazebo or the barn at Hollybush – neither ideal in cold or wet weather). It was also well-used by Leeds Mind for peer support groups and other discussion sessions, as this was a popular venue with beneficiaries.

2.2. Leeds Mind

Leeds Mind's role developed significantly, based on experience from the project's early stages. It was originally envisaged that some beneficiaries from the HPS and TCV groups would move on to peer support groups and courses led by Leeds Mind, and that these groups would build beneficiaries' confidence further, helping them to access other support on their path towards employment.

Early peer support work included one Tree of Life course and one Making Positive Changes course at Leeds Mind, each preceded by a two-hour 'Introduction to Group Work' session. However, take-up of these courses was low, so Leeds Mind broadened its approach to develop more informal peer support activities and inclusive social events, including:

- Outreach discussions, including short 'taster' sessions at all HPS and TCV gardening group sites and informal conversations with beneficiaries there
- Peer support group sessions on a variety of different subjects, mostly suggested by beneficiaries themselves. These ran at TCV (in The Roundhouse when available) rather than Leeds Mind's office, to help maximise attendance
- A 'Mind Body and Stroll' group, which included a walk, mindfulness techniques and poetry
- Social activities aimed at people from all the gardening and walking groups; by March 2019 more than a dozen events had been arranged including 'secret cinema', a musical matinee, a visit to Tropical World in Leeds, a folk music night, and several outdoor walks.
- In addition, the OAW partners jointly organised two Christmas gatherings and three celebration events, in July 2017, March 2018 and May 2019, to which all beneficiaries were invited.

A total of 149 beneficiaries participated in one or more Leeds Mind activities – courses, peer support groups and/or social activities – over the course of the project.

NB: The term "peer support" here refers to group activities designed for this purpose and led by Leeds Mind staff. Other feedback (Section 4) recognises that more informal peer support ("social support") can occur naturally as part of the way that all OAW groups work.

2.3. Output Data

In total 422 beneficiaries registered with OAW from the project's inception up to February 2019. The following tables show how this total breaks down in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and postcode area. (NB: Totals for each partner organisation do not match the overall total because some beneficiaries were members of more than one group during their time with OAW.)

Gender:	Total	Leeds Mind	TCV	HPS
Female	147	32	78	68
Male	206	64	131	87
Do not want to say	2	2	0	2
Other - please specify...	2	0	0	2
Did not say	65	19	17	48
TOTAL:	422	117	226	207

Age Group:	All	Leeds Mind	TCV	HPS
Under 18	3	0	1	2
18 to 24	43	5	25	18
25 to 34	74	14	42	32
35 to 44	59	17	35	25
45 to 54	74	26	44	32
55 to 64	68	20	49	24
65 to 74	19	7	13	7
75 to 84	2	0	2	0
85+	1	1	1	1
Did not say	79	27	14	66
TOTAL:	422	117	226	207

Ethnicity:	Total	Leeds Mind	TCV	HPS
White: English/Scottish/Welsh	298	82	175	132
White: Northern Irish/UK	2	0	0	2
White: Irish	2	0	1	1
White: other - please state	18	3	5	12
Mixed ethnic background	19	6	13	8
Indian	1	1	1	0
Pakistani	8	2	4	4
Chinese	3	1	1	3
Asian Other – please state:	4	1	1	3
Black African	11	4	4	8
Black Caribbean	6	1	5	2
Black Other – please state:	2	0	0	2
Arab	3	2	0	2
Other	4	2	2	3
Not known	41	12	14	25
TOTAL:	422	117	226	207

Postcode	All	Leeds Mind	TCV	HPS
LS 1	3	0	2	1
LS 2	10	2	3	7
LS 3	5	1	2	3
LS 4	11	2	4	7
LS 5	7	1	5	2
LS 6	60	16	21	44
LS 7	31	6	15	16
LS 8	27	6	21	5
LS 9	18	10	6	12
LS 10	7	3	4	4
LS 11	9	5	5	4
LS 12	40	10	26	16
LS 13	40	7	36	6
LS 14	12	6	9	3
LS 15	3	0	2	1
LS 16	21	7	11	9
LS 17	11	7	5	9
LS 18	7	3	5	3
LS 19	3	0	3	0
LS 20	1	1	0	0

LS 21	1	0	0	1
LS 22	2	0	1	1
LS 23	0	0	0	0
LS 24	0	0	0	0
LS 25	0	0	0	0
LS 26	4	1	2	2
LS 27	6	2	3	3
LS 28	16	3	13	5
WF	7	2	6	1
YO	1	0	1	0
S	2	0	1	1
OL	1	0	1	0
BD	4	1	3	1
Not known	52	15	10	40
TOTAL:	422	117	226	207

This data shows that many beneficiaries came from postcodes which include areas of high multiple deprivation. It also suggests that, whilst a few beneficiaries travelled a long distance, transport to OAW sites was an issue for others. For example, some known high-deprivation areas in South Leeds were less well-represented amongst OAW beneficiaries (all OAW sites were north of the River Aire).

2.4 Total Activities and Attendance

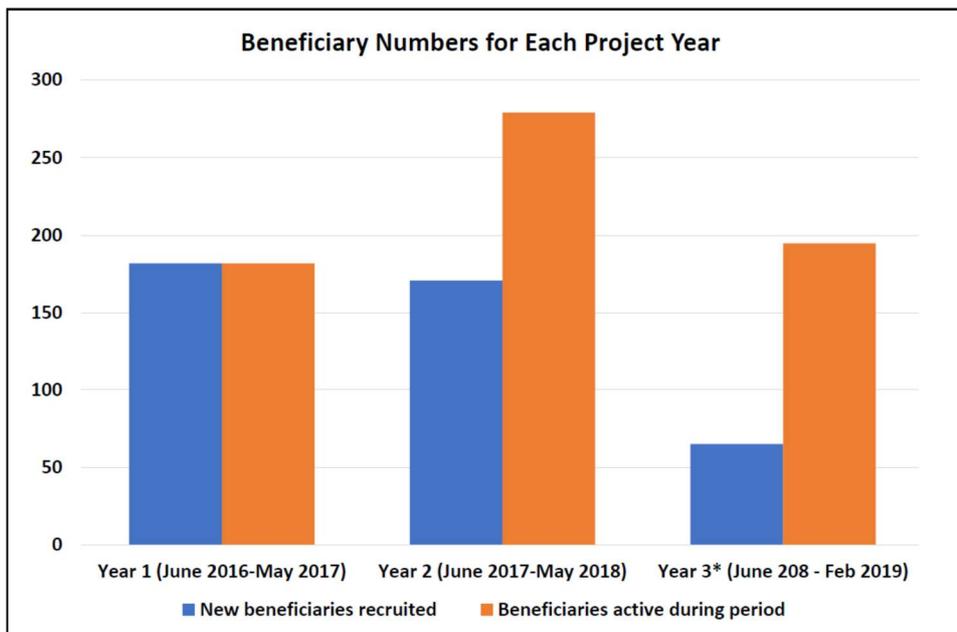
In all, the three partner organisations ran 1169 sessions of all kinds up to the end of February 2019, with a total of 9773 attendances recorded from 422 individual beneficiaries. This indicates an overall average of 23 sessions attended per beneficiary, although there was substantial variation between individuals as the table below shows.

This table indicates how many OAW sessions different beneficiaries attended. It shows that just under 47% of beneficiaries attended five sessions or fewer, whilst just over 16% were clearly long-term participants, attending more than 40.

Unique Beneficiaries	
1 attendance	69
2-5 attendances	128
6-9 attendances	50
10-20 attendances	61
21-40 attendances	45
41+ attendances	69
TOTAL	422

These figures explain why less than half of all beneficiaries completed the evaluation forms analysed in Section 3 and Appendix 1, because many did not stay long enough to receive these forms. The figures also indicate that groups generally had a core of established members, but with sufficient 'turnover' to allow new members to join the groups that suited them.

The chart on the next page shows the number of new beneficiaries registered during each year, and the number who were active (i.e. who attended at least one session) in each of OAW's three years.



*NB: Year three data only covers the nine months June 2018 to February 2019.

Recruitment levels were initially good, as some beneficiaries were already known to OAW from previous projects. They reduced slightly in Year 2, and more significantly in Year 3. This was due, at least in part, to uncertainty about the project’s future; project partners were cautious about recruiting beneficiaries to a project that might soon close.

In terms of activity, the number of beneficiaries peaked in Year 2, with new beneficiaries joining the project as some existing ones continued. Year 3 may have come close to this level had the data extended for a full year.

The original OAW bid to Big Lottery included targets for the number of people benefitting from each project outcome per year. This caused a few concerns amongst staff who sometimes felt pressured to recruit more beneficiaries, and proved difficult to assess in practice, mainly because the chosen evaluation method did not capture feedback from all the beneficiaries who registered with OAW. Future projects of this type may benefit from evaluation methods that collect more immediate feedback, and which focus on the improvements achieved rather than targeting specific numbers. This is picked up in Section 7 Recommendation 1.

Section 3: Outcomes – Quantitative Analysis

This section summarises outcomes data gathered over OAW's three years by the two survey-based feedback methods: Evaluation Forms and the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (SWEMWBS). Data specific to 2018-19 is shown in Appendix 1 to this report, and the forms used are shown in Appendix 2.

3.1. Evaluation Forms

The table below shows evaluation form data from all beneficiaries. These come from beneficiaries' most recent forms, regardless of whether they were still with OAW at February 2019 or had left.

All Beneficiaries: Most Recent Evaluation Form from all groups	N/A	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Blank	Total
1. Increase my weekly exercise	4	1	2	115	66	2	190
2. Improve my physical health	4	1	12	107	64	2	190
3. Feel happier	0	1	3	112	73	1	190
4. Feel less isolated	0	2	5	105	75	3	190
5. Feel like part of a community	0	1	5	101	82	1	190
6. Give and receive support within the group	0	1	3	116	68	2	190
7. Increase my confidence	0	1	10	126	50	3	190
8. Improve my self esteem	0	1	15	121	49	4	190
9. Learn practical skills	0	1	12	121	54	2	190
10. This activity has helped me to believe that I am employable	67	2	20	77	22	2	190
11. This activity has increased my confidence to access employability skills groups	44	5	37	76	21	7	190
12. This activity is a place where I feel safe and free from discrimination	0	2	0	88	95	5	190
13. This activity has increased my awareness of how peer support groups can help me to manage my mental health	18	1	12	103	49	7	190
TOTALS:	131	24	108	1263	595	24	
All Beneficiaries: Most Recent Evaluation Form from HPS or TCV	N/A	Less	About the Same	More		Blank	Total
14. Since attending this activity, I have visited my GP:	12	54	110	8		6	190
15. Since attending this activity, I have accessed mental health services:	82	35	61	8		4	190
TOTALS:	95	69	144	18		4	

Overall feedback from these evaluation forms was very positive. For all questions other than those relating to employment, well over than 90% of responses were either 'agree' or 'strongly agree'.

The most positive response, where 'strongly agree' responses exceeded 'agree' responses, was in relation to feeling safe and free from discrimination (Q12). Feeling part of a community (Q5) and feeling less isolated (Q4) came second and third, with 'strongly agree' responses close to the level of

'agree'. This clearly matched OAW's aims in these areas and supports its objective of reducing social isolation. The proportion of 'strongly agree' responses was slightly lower for increasing confidence and improving self-esteem (Q9 and Q10), but these together with 'agree' responses still made up more than 90% of the total, showing OAW's success in these areas too.

Q10 and Q11 related to employability. For these two questions, about 30% of responses were either 'not applicable' or left blank, and around a further one-sixth were 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'. The remainder – slightly more than half – either agreed or strongly agreed. This is likely to be due to beneficiaries who were either not in the employment field (e.g. over pension age) or were not yet thinking positively about employment.

Q14 and Q15 asked about the use of GP and mental health services. Most respondents either did not answer these questions or said it had made no difference. Of other answers, 54 said they were seeing their GP less whilst only 8 said more, and 35 said they were using mental health services less whilst just 8 said more. Although the extent of change was not quantified, these figures suggest that OAW helped to reduce demands on NHS services by improving some beneficiaries' mental and physical health.

The Interim Evaluation Report (June 2018) included specific data on Evaluation Forms completed by Leeds Mind group participants. This was a small sample however, and collection of these forms by Leeds Mind was discontinued when the nature of its support activities changed (see Section 2.2). Instead, Leeds Mind gathered informal feedback on the various events and activities it ran, and facilitated the Reps Group (see Section 1.2) to gather further input and ideas from beneficiaries. It also facilitated *What Works*, a report compiled by a group of beneficiaries, explained in Section 4.2.

3.2. SWEMWBS

SWEMWBS is a measure of overall wellbeing. It is a subjective indicator, likely to be affected by everything going on in a person's life rather than just their participation in OAW. For this reason, the analysis below does not break down the data between the different courses/activities within OAW. Moreover, it was not generally possible to capture data prior to beneficiaries actually starting with OAW, so the baseline scores may not always be a true reflection of their wellbeing before they joined the project. Even so, data should show whether beneficiaries' wellbeing improved during their time with OAW. The form used is shown at Appendix 2.

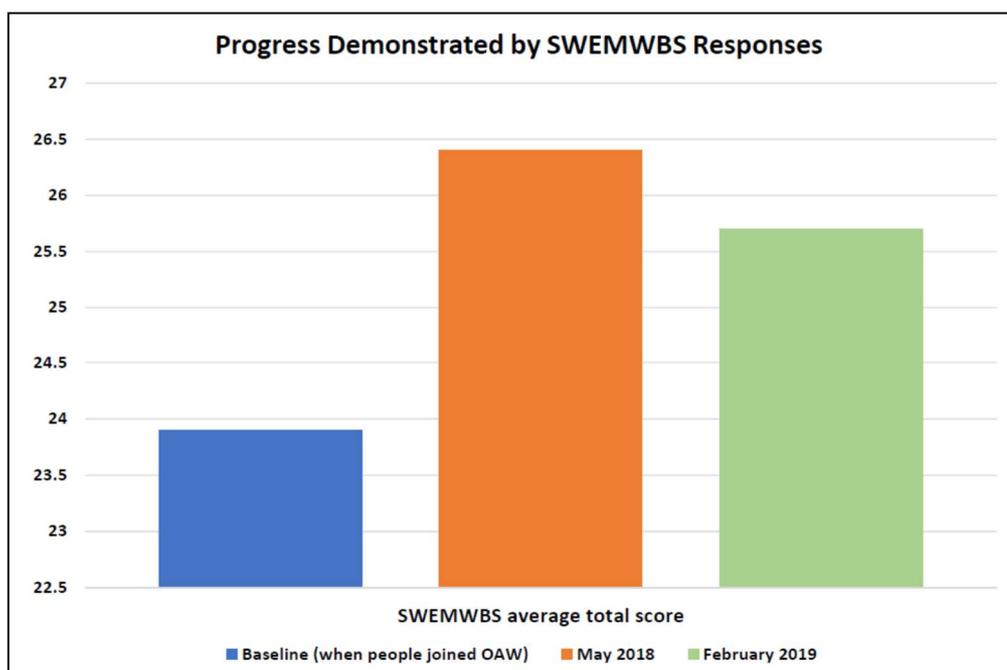
Data from the 172 beneficiaries who completed two or more SWEMWBS returns is shown on the next page. This shows a mean average baseline score, at the start of their engagement with OAW, of 23.9 and a most recent mean average score of 25.7 (both out of a maximum of 35). Although this increase of 1.8 points may seem a modest, it is statistically significant given the number of beneficiaries involved. Full baseline and most recent tables are shown below (NB: this is only for beneficiaries who completed at least two SWEMWEBS returns. Corresponding data for Year 3 only is shown at Appendix 1).

Earliest SWEMWBS	1	2	3	4	5	Total
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	10	23	63	49	27	172
I've been feeling useful	6	23	64	49	30	172
I've been feeling relaxed	5	28	71	41	26	171
I've been dealing with problems well	7	15	73	46	29	170
I've been thinking clearly	4	20	72	43	33	172
I've been feeling close to other people	8	32	57	44	31	172
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	4	21	59	47	41	172
TOTALS	44	162	459	319	217	23.9 average

Latest SWEMWBS	1	2	3	4	5	Total
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	5	17	68	44	38	172
I've been feeling useful	2	13	56	57	43	171
I've been feeling relaxed	4	17	64	48	39	172
I've been dealing with problems well	4	15	67	45	41	172
I've been thinking clearly	2	15	66	41	47	171
I've been feeling close to other people	5	19	52	55	39	170
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	3	12	47	54	55	171
TOTALS	25	108	420	344	302	25.7 average

All seven of the SWEMWBS questions showed improvement from the baseline. The greatest increase in average score came from statement 2 (“I've been feeling useful”) with a mean average increase of 0.31, compared with the lowest improvement from statement 4 (“I've been dealing with problems well”) at 0.16.

However, it is noticeable that the final SWEMWBS average, whilst higher than the baseline, was lower than that reported in the Interim Report for May 2018, which was 26.4. Represented graphically, this trend is shown below:



Discussion with beneficiaries suggested two reasons for this slight decline between May 2018 and February 2019:

1. Seasonal factors – people tend to feel better in the Spring than at the end of Winter. Further analysis however showed that February 2019 scores were lower than February 2018 scores, so this cannot be the only reason.
2. Concerns about the future of OAW beyond May 2019. In February 2019, when final SWEMWBS forms were completed, no decisions had yet been made about the future of any of the OAW groups beyond the end of the project. There was a real possibility that all activities, and associated support, would simply cease due to lack of funding. Whilst the OAW partners were actively seeking to resolve this (see Section 5.4), some beneficiaries became very anxious about it, and found it difficult to think about, let alone discuss.

This points to a need to make suitable arrangements for continuity as early as possible when projects of this type are nearing their end, so as to avoid the risk of causing anxiety and distress to the very people the project is trying to help. This is taken up in Section 7 (Recommendation 4).

Two other significant features were evident from analysis of SWEMWBS scores over the course of the project:

- The baseline average indicates that few beneficiaries entered OAW with very low SWEMWBS scores. The 1,204 total responses (7 statements from each of 172 people) included only 44 scores of 1 (“none of the time”) at the baseline. However, this reduced to just 25 scores of 1 from their most recent returns. This was due partly to practical issues around SWEMWBS (see Section 3.3), and partly because some beneficiaries had already received support from other organisations before joining OAW, hence this was not the start of their overall recovery journey.
- For beneficiaries who had been with OAW over a longer period, SWEMWBS scores showed a ‘plateau effect’ – i.e. they showed improvement early on but then levelled off rather than continuing to improve. Some of the qualitative feedback in Sections 4 and 5 helps to explain this: for at least some of OAW’s longer-term beneficiaries, the project helps ‘keep them well’. They might not continue to get better still, but without OAW their wellbeing and general health would have got significantly worse.

3.3 Data Analysis Considerations

Whilst data collection was intended to operate systematically as described in Section 1.2, a number of practical issues emerged over the course of the project that constrained this:

- Each group collected quarterly feedback (Evaluation Forms and SWEMWBS) in a chosen week at the end of August, November, February and May. However, this feedback could only be collected from beneficiaries who attended the group on that particular day. Because not everyone attended each week, this inevitably meant that feedback returns from some beneficiaries were missed.
- It was not always practical to collect SWEMWBS baseline forms from people at the point they first joined OAW. As a result:
 - The project may already have had a positive influence on the wellbeing of beneficiaries who completed their initial form some weeks after joining OAW
 - Some beneficiaries may not have fully understood SWEMWBS, and may have thought they needed to give high scores as the “right answer”. (30 beneficiaries submitted a baseline SWEMWBS form with a total score of 30, implying that they were very well to begin with.)

- Towards the end of the project there were indications of 'survey fatigue' – beneficiaries who had been with the project for a long time got fed up with repeating the same surveys every quarter, and hence gave less thought to their responses.
- Staffing changes and related issues over the three-year course of the project meant that group leaders were not always able to collect returns and update the database as promptly as they would like.

Also, the HPS site at Cross Green could be readily seen and accessed by the local community, and this meant that 'occasional helpers' would sometimes appear and join the group for a week or two – especially in the summer. It was not possible to formally register all these people as OAW beneficiaries, although they almost certainly benefitted from their brief involvement.

In spite of these constraints, the amount of data collected means that conclusions on improvements in beneficiaries' health and wellbeing are robust. What is more difficult though is to assess the full number of beneficiaries who experienced these improvements. Certainly some beneficiaries may have left the project after a short time for health reasons or because OAW did not suit them. But in other cases even a short engagement with OAW could be very beneficial, and evaluation returns may not have captured this. This is evident from the consultant's discussions with beneficiaries, including one of the case studies in the Interim Report, where a relatively short time with OAW helped the person return to work.

Future projects of this kind may benefit from alternative, possibly simpler, methods of quantitative evaluation, so that data can be captured from more. This is followed up under Recommendation 1 in Section 7.

Section 4: Outcomes – Qualitative Analysis

This section reports qualitative evaluation data, which augments and helps to interpret the quantitative data in Section 3. It is drawn from a range of sources, including the consultant's interviews and other conversations with beneficiaries, the OAW partners' own data capture, and contact with other organisations.

4.1. Interviews with Beneficiaries

Over the course of OAW, the consultant interviewed a total of 38 beneficiaries (some more than once) and had informal conversations with many others. All of the full interviews took place in years 1 and 2 of the project, and were reported in the consultant's Interim Report. For ease of reference, key information is repeated here (with the exception, for reasons of confidentiality, of detailed case studies which also appeared in the Interim Report).

Interviews covered all OAW groups and age ranges, together with different ethnic backgrounds, although most interviewees were white British. Interviewees' time with these groups varied from one week to five years (including former groups run by the same organisation). Because of overlaps, with some beneficiaries attending groups run by more than one OAW partner, it is not practical to separate this feedback between HPS, TCV and Leeds Mind – all relates to OAW as a whole.

Beneficiaries were very willing to speak to the consultant (which itself was a positive sign). All interviewees gave very positive feedback on the group(s) that they were part of and the group leaders who supported them. No significant problems or concerns were raised by anyone, and many wished that OAW could have run more activities than it did.

Beneficiaries had come to OAW from a number of different sources or referral routes. These are summarised below, and show almost half of interviewees coming to the project from other groups run by the OAW partners or through word-of-mouth contacts. Others came through a wide range of different sources, including referral or signposting from other organisations.

Referral sources	Number
From another HPS, TCV or Leeds Mind group	13
Suggested by another Third Sector organisation	7
Word of mouth (from another beneficiary or contact)	5
Suggested by support worker from another service	3
Referred by PEP (Leeds West CCG social prescribing scheme)	2
Internet search	2
Local knowledge / saw the group in action and wanted to join	2
Suggested by medical practitioner	1
Referred by Probation Service	1
Through other OAW project publicity	1
Could not remember	1

Almost all beneficiaries interviewed were members of at least one other group/activity as well as the one they were attending when interviewed. These other groups/activities fell into three categories:

- other groups that were part of the OAW project (this decreased during years 2 and 3; beneficiaries were asked to attend just one group, so that OAW could manage overall numbers)

- other groups with HPS, TCV or Leeds Mind that were not part of OAW
- groups run by other organisations

Correspondingly, most people viewed the group they were with that day as just a part of their recovery or therapy – one person described it as “part of the jigsaw”. This also goes some way to explaining why the baseline SWEMWBS scores are as high as they are (Section 3.2): many beneficiaries were already participating in other therapeutic activities rather than ‘starting from scratch’ with OAW.

All interviewees were asked what benefits they gained from the OAW group(s) they attended. Answers were many and varied, with everyone citing more than one positive outcome for them. The following table groups these responses into some key themes, showing the number of beneficiaries who mentioned each. Again, this combines feedback from all groups – HPS, TCV and Leeds Mind – because many beneficiaries were members of more than one group and thought of the outcomes for them collectively.

Outcome for Beneficiaries	Number
Meeting people, socialising, reducing isolation	28
Reducing anxiety, depression, stress or other mental health symptoms	21
Enjoyment of the outdoors, fresh air	13
Physical exercise or rehabilitation	13
Satisfaction of growing things (gardening groups)	10
Routine, something to do (“getting out of the house”)	9
Gaining new skills/knowledge (usually linked to gardening)	8
Building confidence	5
Respite from caring or other responsibilities	4
Helping other group members	3
Experience relevant to work aims	3
Improving conversational English skills	2*
Improving personal communication skills	1
Giving something to the community (“connecting with Leeds”)	1

*The consultant was also told of two other beneficiaries for whom this was an important reason for joining the group.

N.B: This was asked as an open question, with no prompting on possible answers. People could well have responded positively to other categories had they been suggested; however, the list as shown should indicate what people felt was most important to them.

As the table shows, meeting people and socialising was the most frequent outcome cited, with many interviewees saying they would be sitting at home alone were it not for OAW. Some beneficiaries had also formed friendships through the groups, where they met other group members socially or otherwise kept in touch outside the group meetings. Others had gone on to participate in further groups or activities through connections that OAW had helped them make, or otherwise inspired by OAW. Although beneficiaries rarely used the term “social isolation”, these further connections are fully consistent with that aspect of OAW’s objectives.

Benefits to mental health came a clear second in the table, again fully consistent with OAW objectives. Many interviewees referred to the project as providing a safe, friendly and relaxed environment. Some also appreciated the project being open-ended in this respect; there was no time limit on their participation, and hence they did not feel they were being pushed through a project aimed at getting them back into work, even where this was a longer-term goal for them.

Building confidence seemed to be under-represented given the project's aims, and no-one used the term "self-esteem" when interviewed. This appears to conflict with Evaluation Form feedback which indicates improvements in both these areas (Section 3.1, Q7 and Q8). However, this may simply reflect a reluctance to use these words, as confidence is certainly implicit in some of the other themes noted above.

In some cases, it was evident that interviewees did not necessarily see the benefits of the group in terms of making progress. Rather, the group helped them stay at the same level by providing respite or "keeping depression away". The inference was that they risked relapse or something more serious happening if they did not maintain their connection with the group. Beneficiaries in this category were likely to stay longer with the groups, and were more likely to have experienced anxiety during OAW's later stages when its future was uncertain.

This last point links to data which shows SWEMWBS scores "plateauing" for some beneficiaries. Discussions with staff and beneficiaries suggest three possible reasons why people's SWEMWBS score might not increase:

- "treading water"; their score would be worse – possibly much worse – than the baseline without OAW support (data analysis in Section 3.2 is consistent with this explanation)
- over-scoring on the baseline assessment, possibly due to misunderstanding the purpose of SWEMWBS; their later assessments may therefore be more realistic (Section 3.3)
- other negative life changes counter-acting the positive influence of OAW.

Finally, several beneficiaries acknowledged that they were participating to support others as well as themselves, and recognised that an element of informal peer support (social support) occurred naturally as part of group interaction, even where this was not formally planned.

4.2 Other Beneficiary Feedback

The OAW partner organisations collected their own feedback and case study examples throughout the project's three years, in addition to data for this report. Examples of such further feedback:

- Leeds Mind collected comments and informal feedback on the various outing and social activities it ran for participants in all of the gardening and walking groups.
- Leeds Mind also facilitated a Reps Groups, which acted as a forum for feedback and further ideas for OAW.
- HPS produced its own case studies from narratives written by beneficiaries.
- The July 2017 celebration event at TCV's Hollybush site included a 'Feedback Tree', on which attendees posted their comments on what the OAW project meant to them.

Information from all these sources is included in the Interim Evaluation Report, so is not repeated here in detail, although some quotes are shown in Section 6.

In addition, Leeds Mind facilitated a group of ten beneficiaries drawn from all of the OAW groups to compile a piece of research in time for the final celebration event on 21 May 2019. The booklet, entitled *What Works*, compiled feedback from many beneficiaries across the project on what it was that made OAW a success, and includes a large number of quotes and photographs. Its key themes are summarised here:

- It's safe enough – a safe and secure space, feeling comfortable with other people

- Feel of the group – the people, culture, flexibility and acceptance, not feeling pressurised
- Getting me out of the house – motivation to do something, get out and meet people
- Commitment – commitment to do something, a bit of discipline
- Structure – part of a regular routine, something to look forward to each week
- Social side – meeting people, talking, making new friendships and increasing social networks
- Learning – gaining new knowledge and skills in gardening, finding out about nature
- Exercise and physical benefits – feeling better, getting exercise that isn't too hard
- Fresh air and nature – enjoying fresh air, sunshine, wildlife and the natural environment
- Variety – working with different people and on different activities
- Cake and tea breaks – a chance to sit down, chat and socialise, and a kind of reward
- Extending my comfort zone – the chance to try new things and socialise in new situations
- Contributing – the feeling of doing something worthwhile, giving something to the community
- Satisfaction – sense of achievement and pride in seeing what you and the group have done
- Positivity – feeling relaxed and calm, improved wellbeing (“free endorphins”)
- Mental health effects – more confidence, less stress, helps put things in perspective
- Sanctuary/Peace/Oasis – the garden as a quiet haven of peace, an oasis of calm
- Precious – something special and personal that is very important to people

Whilst consistent with feedback gathered by the consultant, these themes and the detail behind them add further depth to understanding OAW's success, as well as being beneficiaries' own testament to its achievements. The full version of this booklet is therefore reproduced as an Annex to this report.

4.3 Feedback from External Contacts

External contacts were people from other organisations who referred or signposted people to OAW, or who otherwise collaborated with the project (such as HPS's partners at their various sites). The consultant interviewed 14 such contacts from 11 different organisations, most in early 2018 but some again in early 2019. The organisations concerned were:

- Armley Mills Museum
- Cross Green Community Group
- Forward Leeds
- Friends of Bedford Fields
- Leeds & York Partnership Foundation NHS Trust
- Leeds Community Healthcare Trust
- Leeds Mind Wellbeing Team
- Leeds Volunteer Centre
- Voluntary Action Leeds
- Workplace Leeds
- WYFI (West Yorkshire – Finding Independence)

Detailed feedback was included in the Interim Report, and is summarised here (“referral” may have been a formal process or simply a suggestion to the beneficiary, depending on the situation). The representatives interviewed:

- were very appreciative of the work the OAW project partners did; staff from all three organisations were described as friendly, welcoming and professional
- had full confidence in the way the OAW partners ran groups and activities, including safeguarding and managing risk
- tended to refer to HPS or TCV rather than OAW as such, mainly because of personal contacts and connections built up over time
- saw the beneficiaries they knew becoming more active, getting out more and increasing their social connections
- recognised the benefits of group working, including social support
- would have been hard-pressed to find suitable alternatives for beneficiaries if the OAW groups were not there
- found most referrals to be successful, and received positive feedback on OAW from the beneficiaries they referred.

As well as clear benefits to at least some of the beneficiaries referred, this feedback also indicates that the involvement of both HPS and TCV brought more beneficiaries to OAW than either organisation could have achieved by itself.

Finally, some early 2019 interviews with HPS partner organisations (Armley Mills Museum, Cross Green Community Group, Friends of Bedford Fields) included their views on ‘fledging’ – see Section 5.4.

Section 5: Moving On – People and Project Groups

Most of the data presented in earlier sections of this report is retrospective, based on beneficiaries' experience during their time with the OAW project. This section looks at two closely-related further aspects:

- Those beneficiaries who leave the project groups, and what happens to them
- What options there are for the groups themselves in the future.

5.1 Turnover and Progression

No time limit was placed on beneficiaries' participation in OAW. Although the long-term goal, at least for some beneficiaries, was that they should move towards employment, they were not pressured to do so. Rather, they were encouraged to take up other activities, supported by Leeds Mind, that would further increase their confidence and self-esteem, and enable them to access other forms of employment support. The fact that OAW worked in this way was appreciated by many beneficiaries (see Section 4.1).

Significant turnover within the project occurred naturally, as people either progressed from the groups or moved on for other reasons. The OAW database did not originally record this, but in 2017-18 a new field was added to it. This enabled the partner organisations to record how beneficiaries progressed, or otherwise moved on, when they left OAW groups. This was not always known; some beneficiaries simply stopped attending without giving any reason. Group leaders followed up such beneficiaries where possible however, and 97 beneficiaries were recorded as having moved on:

Progression	Number
Volunteering	12
Employment	25
Formal Education	4
Training/course	13
Facilitator Training [Leeds Mind]	2
Moved on	25
Other	16

It is noteworthy here that, although actual transition to employment is not a specific OAW objective, this has happened in at least 25 known instances – more than 7% of all beneficiaries who have registered with the project.

The 'Moved On' category covers various personal circumstances such as moving away from the area, child-care responsibilities or other commitments which take precedence over OAW attendance.

5.2 Examples of Progression

To complement the figures above, the consultant reviewed 36 of the beneficiaries he interviewed in years 1 and 2 of OAW, to ascertain their progress and current situation – in effect “where are they now?”. This was done in early 2019 from database records, from discussions with OAW group leaders, and in some cases from seeing the same beneficiaries again. The table shows these findings (anonymously).

Beneficiary	Latest known situation
A	Now in full-time employment with one of the OAW partner organisations
B	Still attends OAW group, also a member of the Reps Group and active with other projects too
C	Still attends OAW group, also a member of Reps Group
D	Was doing casual/part-time work, now in full-time work (still in touch with OAW)
E	Still attends OAW group, has also done other training courses at TCV
F	"Really blossomed" during her time with OAW, now moved away to a new area
G	Still attends OAW group, active in promoting Leeds Mind social activities
H	Still attends OAW group & other TCV courses, has made progress on physical health
I	Left, believed to be pregnant
J	Left, current situation not known
K	Left, current situation not known (lived a long way outside Leeds)
L	In full-time work whilst with OAW, now unable to attend OAW group due to change in work role and shifts
M	In full-time work whilst with OAW, now unable to attend due to work commitments
N	No longer attends group – struggling with mental health and carer responsibilities
O	Qualified doctor who needed to improve English, no longer with OAW, current situation not known
P	Still attends OAW group, also involved with Leeds Mind social activities
Q	Still attends OAW group
R	Has not attended recently, understood to be unwell and possibly moving away
S	Still attends OAW group
S	Still attends OAW group but "a changed person" – has made huge progress in becoming more sociable and less isolated
U	Still attends OAW group, has also been on training courses and has organised other activities outside of OAW
V	No longer attends due to physical health problems, known to volunteer elsewhere
W	Left OAW for a while due to health issues but has recently returned
X	Still attends OAW group
Y	Still attends OAW group
Z	Absent for a while due to health issues but has recently returned to group
AA	Still attends OAW group, understood to do some part-time work as well now
BB	Still attends OAW group
CC	Left OAW after about two months, understood to have returned to full-time work
DD	Left OAW due to mental health issues, recently returned with Support Worker
EE	Still attends OAW group
FF	Left OAW, situation not known but was looking for work and likely to have found it
GG	Still attends OAW group, considering role as Volunteer Officer with TCV
HH	Was, and is still, a Volunteer Officer with TCV
II	Still attends OAW group, also on Reps Group & supports Leeds Mind social activities
JJ	Now in full-time self-employment

This list is a fairly random sample of OAW beneficiaries, because interviewees were selected at random (from those who agreed to talk) from the various OAW groups. However, those who attended OAW for just a short time are likely to be under-represented as there was less chance of these beneficiaries being picked up at interview.

Whilst the list shows some beneficiaries as still being with OAW groups, there are many examples of people who have made substantial progress within this context. Group leaders are able to quote examples of beneficiaries who were withdrawn, isolated and uncommunicative when they first came to the groups and who are now much more engaged, sociable, and able to take on new roles.

5.3 Age and Progression

Evaluation also reviewed whether older beneficiaries stayed with OAW longer, as younger people were more likely to find work or move on from the groups in other ways. The data reported in Section 2.4 on number of attendances formed the starting point for this. However, measuring how long people stay with groups is not as easy as counting attendances, as it depends on when they are counted as having left, which is not always clear-cut.

With this caveat, data indicates some tendency for older beneficiaries to stay with OAW groups for a longer time, particularly those in the 61-70 age group. This was not a clear trend though, and there were many examples of younger beneficiaries who had been with their groups for a long period, as well as older people who had left after a short while. The conclusion is that age may be a factor in how long beneficiaries stayed with OAW, but it was not an overriding one.

From the consultant's observations, and from discussions with beneficiaries and group leaders, it was evident that each group developed its own character and 'dynamic' over time. This could be based on several factors such as the group's location, other partner organisations (if any) and the preferences of beneficiaries themselves. This aspect, rather than just age, was more likely to influence how long beneficiaries remained with their groups.

It also shows how OAW was not just a 'one size fits all' solution, and that the groups developed to suit the needs of their beneficiaries, becoming mini-communities for those involved. All groups had a core of regular, established members (of varying ages), yet were open and welcoming to new beneficiaries joining them.

5.4 Group Continuity and "Fledging"

Over the last year of OAW, the project partners discussed what might happen to their various groups if bids or other sources of further funding failed and support had to be discontinued. This came to be known as fledging, based on the idea that some groups at least might become independent enough to 'fly the nest' and run themselves. The possibility of fledging was most relevant to the HPS-led groups and to TCV's walking and Oakwood Hall groups; TCV's other gardening groups were based at its Hollybush site, hence could not operate independently of TCV.

It was clear that fledging was different to other informal contacts between beneficiaries outside of their group meetings. For example, a few members of TCV's walking group chose to go out walking by themselves at other times, and members of HPS's 'Lost Plot' group met on other occasions as well (in particular, when one regular member was seriously injured in a motorbike accident, other group members organised themselves to visit him in hospital and keep in touch beyond that). This kind of social interaction is completely consistent with OAW's aims and illustrates its success; it does not need any involvement from the OAW partners.

Continuing a to run a gardening or walking groups without OAW support would be a different matter though, as this would almost certainly require some kind of structure with associated responsibilities

including insurance, safeguarding, health and safety and managing finances. In February 2019, with the future still uncertain, HPS produced a brief paper explaining the various options (e.g. small group, constituted group, incorporated organisation) and sought to discuss these ideas with the various groups. Leeds Mind also tried to discuss future options with the Reps Groups. However, these efforts met with little success. Many beneficiaries were had developed a strong bond with the project, felt a sense of attachment to group leaders, and found it hard to come to terms with the possibility that all of this might end.

By the end of the project, the only group which had made significant progress towards fledging was the HPS gardening group at Cross Green. This had been established in partnership with a local community group in the area – something that also enabled new beneficiaries to come to the group through local contacts, as well as other referral routes. The group is now established as a registered charity, with key local people in place to ensure that its work can continue.

For other groups, fledging remains a longer-term ambition. Beneficiaries have shown themselves to be very capable of taking on greater roles within their groups as well as socialising outside of OAW. Some have also been on further training, for example as walk leaders with TCV. However, the skills and confidence needed to take on more formalised leadership roles take a considerable time to develop, and was not achieved within the timeframe of the OAW project. (This view was supported by external contacts, who felt that the groups they were connected with would struggle to continue without sustained HPS or TCV support.)

The fledging principle remains a cornerstone of the OAW continuation project now being started by HPS, following a positive funding decision in mid-April 2019. Evidence from OAW suggests that the route to achieving this lies through:

- (a) encouraging beneficiaries to take on additional roles such as organising and communicating with others, providing informal help and support, and picking up things that their group needs (this is similar to the role of Volunteer Officer, which already exists within TCV);
- (b) encouraging other social contacts between group members, outside the groups themselves
- (c) working with other partner organisations at the various sites, so that beneficiaries are not relying solely on HPS for organisational support.

This approach still needs to consider safeguarding issues and beneficiaries who may need particular support. However, more general social support between group members is already evident and could be strengthened further by this approach. This could enable HPS (or other organisations in a similar position) to take a more 'arm's length' role in running the groups, and through this to extend the project further, with new groups to reach new beneficiaries. Recommendation 2 in Section 7 follows up these ideas.

Section 6: Conclusions

This section follows up information from Sections 3 to 5 to draw conclusions on the progress and overall success of OAW. It also highlights how the project has learned from, and responded to, the experience it has gained.

6.1 Overall Achievements

Over its three years, the OAW project was very successful in achieving its core aims of improving physical and mental health, reducing social isolation, strengthening confidence and resilience, and enhancing practical and life skills. Although people gaining employment was not a specific aim, at least 25 beneficiaries achieved this goal through their participation in the project, and many others felt more ready for employment in the future.

Evidence for this is both quantitative and qualitative. Evaluation forms completed by beneficiaries showed overwhelming positive responses to all questions linked to the project's aims (although slightly lower on progress towards employment as this was not applicable for some beneficiaries). SWEMWBS returns also confirmed a small but significant improvement in beneficiaries' overall wellbeing during their time with OAW. These statistical sources are supported by many examples of how individuals have benefitted from the project and made progress in their lives.

In total, 422 beneficiaries registered with OAW up to February 2019, and the final total to the end of May will certainly exceed this. More still may have briefly joined some groups and then moved on before they could be formally registered – particularly for community-linked HPS groups such as Cross Green. There are indications that recruitment has slowed during Year 3 as OAW approached its end, and it is evident that consistent efforts will always be required for projects like this to reach people in need. Recommendation 3 in Section 7 picks up this point.

This means that OAW compared well with overall numbers linked to its four key aims (see Section 1.1). Within this though, it is difficult to say exactly how many people benefitted in these various ways, because timescales and other practical issues meant that evaluation data was only captured for just under half of all beneficiaries. Others left before completing any returns, and Recommendation 1 in the next section suggests how data capture might be improved for future projects of this kind. It also emphasises that, in this context, outcomes are more important than the number of beneficiaries registered.

Ultimately, the strongest evidence of success comes from beneficiaries themselves. Some have progressed into work or other activities beyond OAW; others remained with the project but achieved substantial personal growth. Group leaders were able to cite many examples of beneficiaries who were isolated and uncommunicative (e.g. hoodie up, earphones plugged in) when they first joined OAW, and who were now sociable, positive and contributing members of the group.

The Interim Report (June 2018) included a number of case study examples, and a selection of quotes from beneficiaries themselves is shown on the next page. Many further quotes, together with further information on what made OAW successful, are included in the 'What Works' Annex to this report.

What Beneficiaries Said About OAW:



6.2. Progress and Moving On

OAW was open-ended, in that it did not limit the period that people stayed with their groups. This was seen by many beneficiaries as one of the project's strengths, because they did not feel pressured to leave or make specific progress in a limited time. It also worked well in terms of 'turnover', in that people leaving the groups gave opportunities for new beneficiaries to join, and more established group members were able to welcome them and give social support.

It was often not possible to determine why beneficiaries left OAW, particularly where they had been with the project only for a short time. In some cases this was due to mental or physical health problems (some of these beneficiaries left and then returned later), or because OAW simply did not suit them; in other cases they had already benefitted from the project and moved on successfully. Sections 5.1 and 5.2 show examples of all of these outcomes.

The converse also applies, in that those who stayed with their groups for a long time were still benefitting from it. Some referred to OAW "keeping them well" – in other words, their mental health and wellbeing might not continue to improve, but would have got significantly worse without

OAW. Personal growth was also evident in many longer-term beneficiaries, and the additional activities run by Leeds Mind were a significant factor here. Some of these beneficiaries were able to take on informal roles and responsibilities, both within their groups and more widely for OAW (for example through the Reps Group and in compiling the Annex to this report).

This links to the concept of fledging (Section 5.4): the idea that groups might ultimately become self-sustaining and run themselves. The conclusion here is that this is currently achievable only for groups with significant links to other organisations. For beneficiaries who come into a project like OAW needing help and support, gaining the skills and confidence to lead such a group independently will take a considerable time. Nevertheless, this is the aim of "OAW2", the continuation project led by HPS. The experience of some individuals indicates that this is achievable, and Recommendation 2 in Section 7 suggests how this might be pursued (for this and other similar projects).

6.3. Value of Partnership

OAW was a partnership between three different voluntary organisations, two of them linked to national networks, the third local and independent. Working together had its challenges, but proved very successful overall. Through their various connections, the three partner organisations were able to recruit more beneficiaries than any of them could have done individually, as well as providing a wider range of activities and opportunities.

Whilst all supported common aims, the partner organisations naturally came to OAW with different ways of working. Some of this was addressed through formal agreements (for example around data sharing/protection), but personal contacts and discussions proved even more important. This enabled the partners to plan cohesively for OAW as a whole, and was also very valuable at group leader level, to discuss practical issues, share experiences and provide mutual support.

Equally important was the ability to be flexible as the project progressed. Both HPS and TCV were able to extend their reach through new gardening sites, and Leeds Mind developed a wide range of less formal peer support sessions and wider social activities across all of OAW, replacing more formal peer support courses which had limited take-up in the project's early stages. These wider activities proved popular with beneficiaries, and enhanced their social networking and skills beyond the gardening and walking groups.

6.4. Next Steps

In mid-April of 2019, HPS heard that their bid for project continuation ('OAW2') had been approved by Big Lottery. At around the same timescale, TCV confirmed that their gardening and walking groups could transfer to other funding streams and hence would continue. This means that the existing groups will continue, with HPS groups pursuing the aim of 'fledging' on a phased basis over the next five years. No specific funding has been secured to extend Leeds Mind's role, but it will continue to maintain contact with HPS and TCV.

These funding decisions came quite late – around six weeks before OAW was due to close, and many months after bids had been submitted – and this delay raised concerns and anxieties amongst both staff and beneficiaries. This had a negative impact both on beneficiary numbers, and on their wellbeing, as evidenced in Sections 2.3 and 3.2. The need for projects of this kind to recognise and address such 'run-down' issues is noted in Section 7: Recommendation 4.

Section 7: Recommendations

This section contains four recommendations based on the experience of OAW and this evaluation over its three years of running. Because the project has now ended, these recommendations are aimed at future projects of this kind (including the continuation project led by HPS which has now had funding confirmed).

Recommendation 1: Focus on outcomes rather than numbers. Judge projects of this kind based on the difference they make to people's lives rather than how many people they 'get through the door'.

Numerical targets in the original OAW bid proved unhelpful in practice, and could have led to the project prioritising the number of beneficiaries recruited over the outcomes achieved for them. Whilst some reference to numbers is probably appropriate, projects of this kind should focus on the difference they make to people's lives rather than just numbers.

Data collection should pick up feedback on outcomes as quickly and simply as possible. For example, rather than the three-month cycle used by OAW, similar projects might use:

- (a) a short, purpose-designed questionnaire form for individual beneficiaries to complete once they have been with the project four to six weeks; and
- (b) an update version to be used perhaps six-monthly or annually thereafter

Recommendation 2: Make the most of support from volunteers and beneficiaries themselves, to help run the groups and support others.

This recommendation links to the idea of fledging, and supports the development of beneficiaries themselves. Getting beneficiaries to help run groups is a 'win-win'; it goes beyond normal group participation by helping people to become more skilled, confident and less socially isolated. It also shares the workload for project staff, potentially increasing the capacity and reach of the project as a whole.

TCV already has a formal role of Volunteer Officer that fits well with this concept. Other projects could benefit from something similar, formalised or not depending on their situation. For OAW, the additional roles and activities promoted by Leeds Mind were very helpful in supporting beneficiaries' development, and future projects should also try to promote this type of wider engagement.

Recommendation 3: Continue to develop external partnerships and contacts as much as possible, with a wide range of publicity methods, so as to reach beneficiaries that the project can help most.

Whilst the number of beneficiaries recruited to OAW was generally good, there is always the scope to do better, and certainly there are many more people with the potential to benefit from projects like OAW. Evidence indicates that recruitment is something that needs to be worked on consistently, through as wide a range of sources, contacts and publicity methods as possible. Section 4.3 confirms that referring organisations tend to go to people they know, so building up and constantly extending the network of potential referrers is a key part of this.

Recommendation 4: Plan well ahead for project continuity. Late decisions on what will happen when funding ends can cause stress and anxiety for the very people the project is trying to help.

Evidence of OAW 'tailing off' in early 2019 is clear from numbers in Section 2 and from beneficiary feedback, and this appears to be due at least partly to late decisions on project continuation. For HPS this was linked to late decisions by Big Lottery; for TCV the issue was more internal, around allocation of funding from various existing sources. In both cases, the impact on beneficiaries was a negative one, and this should be avoided if at all possible by future projects. The earlier plans can be made for continuity beyond the end of the funding period, the better the outcomes are likely to be for everyone involved.

Appendix 1: Summary of Data for Year 3

For reporting purposes and convenient reference, this appendix brings together data specific to Year 3 of the OAW project. (NB: This covers only the nine-month period June 2018 to February 2019, this being the last data collection point).

Activity

69 new beneficiaries registered with OAW between June 2018 and February 2019, although four of these did not subsequently attend any activities. The tables below show demographic data for the 65 who did, and correspond to the data in Section 2.3 just for this period. (NB: These tables show the number of beneficiaries who attended activities led by the different OAW partners. Some beneficiaries attended more than one, hence totals in each line can be more than the All column.)

Gender:	All	Leeds Mind	TCV	HPS
Female	19	4	11	7
Male	25	5	13	11
Other - please specify...	1	0	0	1
Did not say	20	2	11	10
TOTAL:	65	11	35	29

Age Group:	All	Leeds Mind	TCV	HPS	OAW
Under 18	1	0	1	0	1
18 to 24	6	0	3	3	1
25 to 34	12	2	7	4	0
35 to 44	12	2	6	5	5
45 to 54	9	2	4	5	0
55 to 64	10	2	6	4	1
65 to 74	4	0	4	0	1
75 to 84	0	0	0	0	0
85+	1	1	1	1	1
Did not say	10	2	3	7	2
TOTAL:	65	11	35	29	12

Ethnicity of attendees:	All	Leeds Mind	TCV	HPS	OAW
White: English/Scottish/Welsh	40	7	24	14	6
White: Northern Irish/UK	1	0	0	1	0
White: Irish	1	0	0	1	0
White: other - please state	2	0	1	1	0
Mixed ethnic background	3	1	2	1	2
Chinese	1	0	0	1	0
Asian Other – please state:	1	1	0	1	0
Black African	1	0	0	1	0
Black Caribbean	2	1	2	1	1
Black Other – please state:	1	0	0	1	1

Arab	1	0	0	1	0
Did not say	11	1	6	5	2
TOTAL:	65	11	35	29	12

POST CODE:	All	Leeds Mind	TCV	HPS	OAW
LS 1	2	0	2	0	0
LS 2	2	0	0	2	0
LS 3	1	0	0	1	0
LS 4	3	1	2	1	0
LS 5	0	0	0	0	0
LS 6	6	1	3	3	1
LS 7	5	0	1	4	3
LS 8	8	2	5	3	1
LS 9	1	0	1	0	0
LS 10	0	0	0	0	0
LS 11	2	0	2	0	0
LS 12	7	0	4	3	0
LS 13	3	0	3	0	1
LS 14	1	1	0	1	0
LS 15	0	0	0	0	0
LS 16	6	2	3	1	1
LS 17	3	2	1	3	2
LS 18	1	0	1	0	0
LS 19	1	0	1	0	0
LS 20	0	0	0	0	0
LS 21	0	0	0	0	0
LS 22	0	0	0	0	0
LS 23	0	0	0	0	0
LS 24	0	0	0	0	0
LS 25	0	0	0	0	0
LS 26	0	0	0	0	0
LS 27	1	0	1	0	0
LS 28	1	0	0	1	0
LS 29	0	0	0	0	0
WF	1	0	1	0	0
YO	0	0	0	0	0
S	1	0	1	0	0
OL	0	0	0	0	0
BD	1	0	1	0	0
DT	0	0	0	0	0
Did not say	0	0	0	0	0
N/A	8	2	2	6	3
TOTAL:	65	11	35	29	12

Overall, the demographic data for Year 3 is similar to that for earlier years, with slightly reduced diversity in terms of ethnicity and postcodes, reflecting the lower number of new beneficiaries registered in this period.

Outcomes

The tables below correspond to those in Sections 3.2 and 3.3, but just for those beneficiaries who first registered with OAW between June 2018 and February 2019 and who had stayed with the project for at least three months by February 2019. This is therefore quite a small sample.

All Beneficiaries: Most Recent Evaluation Form from all groups	N/A	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Blank	Total
1. Increase my weekly exercise	0	0	0	6	2	1	9
2. Improve my physical health	0	0	1	5	2	1	9
3. Feel happier	0	0	0	6	2	1	9
4. Feel less isolated	0	0	0	6	2	1	9
5. Feel like part of a community	0	0	0	7	1	1	9
6. Give and receive support within the group	0	0	0	7	1	1	9
7. Increase my confidence	0	0	1	5	2	1	9
8. Improve my self esteem	0	0	1	5	2	1	9
9. Learn practical skills	0	0	0	5	3	1	9
10. This activity has helped me to believe that I am employable	1	0	1	4	2	1	9
11. This activity has increased my confidence to access employability skills groups	0	0	3	3	2	1	9
12. This activity is a place where I feel safe and free from discrimination	0	0	0	4	4	1	9
13. This activity has increased my awareness of how peer support groups can help me to manage my mental health	1	0	1	4	1	2	9
	N/A	Less	About the Same	More		Blank	Total
14. Since attending this activity, I have visited my GP:	0	1	7	0		1	9
15. Since attending this activity, I have accessed mental health services:	2	1	5	0		1	9
TOTALS:	4	2	20	67	26	16	

Earliest SWEMWBS	1	2	3	4	5	Total
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	2	2	5	5	1	15
I've been feeling useful	0	3	4	6	2	15
I've been feeling relaxed	0	2	8	3	2	15
I've been dealing with problems well	1	1	6	5	1	14
I've been thinking clearly	0	1	6	6	2	15
I've been feeling close to other people	1	4	4	4	2	15
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	0	2	4	7	2	15
TOTALS	4	15	37	36	12	23.3 average

Latest SWEMWBS	1	2	3	4	5	Total
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	1	1	6	5	2	15
I've been feeling useful	0	1	5	7	2	15
I've been feeling relaxed	0	2	6	7	0	15
I've been dealing with problems well	0	1	8	5	1	15
I've been thinking clearly	0	0	11	3	1	15
I've been feeling close to other people	0	3	7	4	1	15
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	0	0	5	10	0	15
TOTALS	1	8	48	41	7	24.0 average

These figures show only a marginal improvement over the period measured. Reasons for this are likely to be similar to those explained in Section 3.3 – a combination of seasonal factors together with uncertainty about the groups' future.

Appendix 2: Evaluation Forms

This is the main evaluation form that was used by HPS and TCV. Leeds Mind used the same form but without Q11 and Q13.



Monitoring form

Name: _____ Date: _____

Group: _____

This form will be used to help provide confidential feedback to our funders about your experiences of Outdoors, Active & Well activities.

1. **This activity has helped me to increase my weekly exercise**

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------
2. **This activity has helped me to improve my physical health**

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------
3. **This activity has helped me to feel happier**

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------
4. **This activity has helped me to feel less isolated**

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------
5. **This activity has helped me to feel like part of a community**

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------
6. **This activity has helped me to give and receive support within the group**

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------
7. **This activity has helped me to increase my confidence**

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------
8. **This activity has helped me to improve my self esteem**

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------
9. **This activity has helped me to learn practical skills**

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------
10. **This activity has helped me to believe that I am employable**

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------	----------------

Please turn over and complete the back of the form.

11. This activity has increased my confidence to access employability skills groups

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

12. This activity is a place where I feel safe and free from discrimination

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

13. This activity has increased my awareness of how peer support groups can help me to manage my mental health

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

14. Since attending this activity, I have visited my GP:

Less	About the same	More
------	----------------	------

15. Since attending this activity, I have accessed mental health services:

Less	About the same	More	Not applicable
------	----------------	------	----------------

The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS)

For each statement, please tick the box that is closest to how you have felt over the last two weeks.

	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	Most of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future					
I've been feeling useful					
I've been feeling relaxed					
I've been dealing with problems well					
I've been thinking clearly					
I've been feeling close to other people					
I've been able to make up my own mind about things					

Thank you for completing this form.