



University of Essex



# Sharing the Harvest project: independent evaluation summary

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# Brighton & Hove Food Partnership is a hub for information, inspiration and connection around food.

A non-profit organisation that helps people learn to cook, to eat a healthy diet, to grow their own food and to waste less food.

- Work with individuals
- Work with groups
- Work at a strategy and policy level

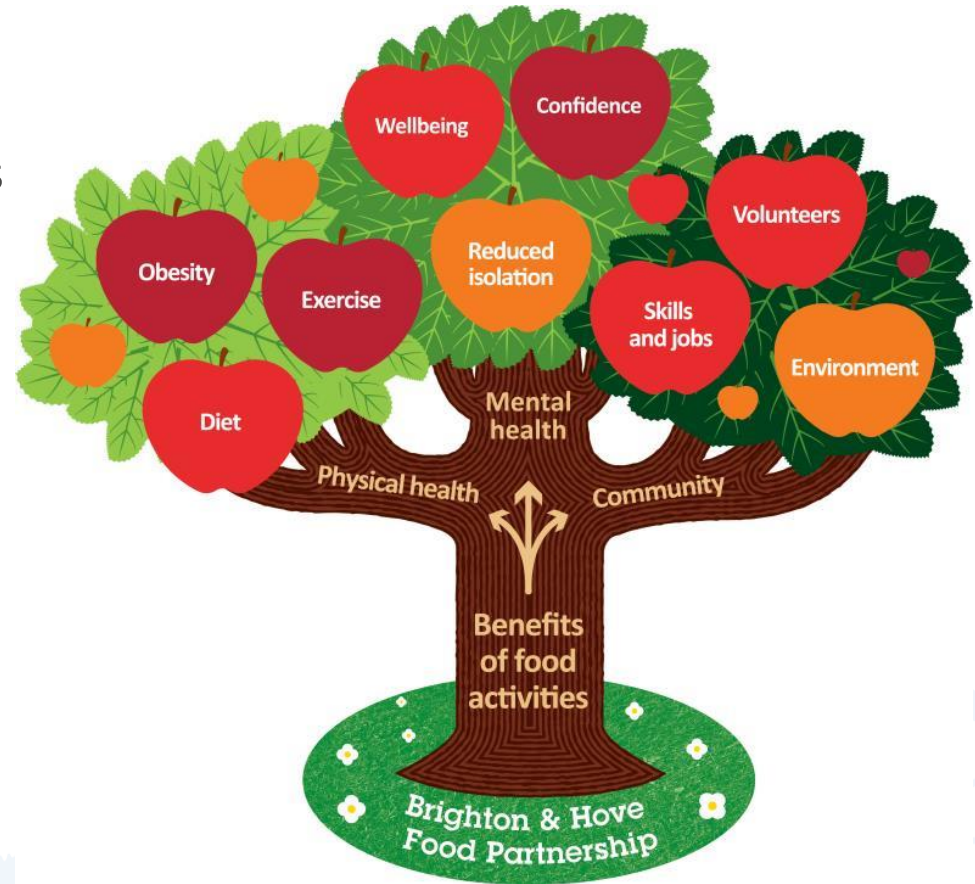
These are interconnected.



# Sharing the Harvest project

October 2014-September 2017

- Building on previous work to setup & run community gardens
- New project to help more vulnerable adults to benefit from gardening
- Aimed to improve:
  - physical health
  - mental wellbeing
  - skills & confidence
  - Sustainability of community gardens working with vulnerable adults



# Who we reached

- Adults with learning disabilities & autism: over **500** people involved
- Adults with experience of mental health issues, homelessness, abuse, substance/ alcohol misuse: over **1,500** people involved
- At least **1,500** different vulnerable adults visited a garden during the project



“I need to do stuff like this. I’m a year off the drink and I’m moving into my own flat out of the hostel. So I need a routine, doing stuff regularly, working like this... So this has a massive impact on my future and it’s an important part of my recovery plan.”

# Where activities took place

Over 75 community gardens across the city, we worked closely with:

- 5 'open' partner gardens that work with vulnerable adults & the wider community
- 18 'specialist' partner gardens, mostly based in services (eg hostels, community centres)
- 3 garden projects run by the FP (Preston Park, Saunders Park, 'Roots & Boots')
- 13 new gardens were setup during the project



“My head goes crazy with nothing to do due to the ADHD. Here I am peaceful, calm... people accept me, I can just be chilled and not stressed about my life and social situations.”

“When I first moved in I felt quite isolated but now having this garden space which we all share, it feels to me like having a family.”

# Volunteering advice

- Personalised advice/ referral service to help people find the right gardening experience for them
- **550+** vulnerable adults received **1-2-1 advice & support**
- **400+** vulnerable adults attended **talks** about volunteering
- Growth from 13 to 35 **referral organisations**
- 76% of vulnerable adults came to the FP via referral from a service.



“Many thanks for referring me to volunteer... the whole thing exceeded my expectations... I felt that working with my hands and doing something practical was very therapeutic for me.”

# Other activities

- 43 ‘taster sessions’ for groups of vulnerable adults interested to try gardening (reaching 250+ people)
- 45 training courses & workshops reaching over 200 different people (eg first aid, food hygiene, outdoor cookery and how to tailor garden activities to particular client groups)
- This also includes **visits** between gardens to share knowledge & ideas



“It lifts my mood and I feel like I’ve done something useful for the day. It sets me up for the day, I feel energised for the rest of the day.”

# Monitoring & evaluation methods

- National leaders, **University of Essex**, conducted independent analysis of questionnaires from over 1,000 people
- **Questionnaires:** Five different forms, with guidance for staff and volunteers
- **Snapshot:** Baseline and follow up at one gardening session
- **Long-term:** Baseline and follow up over 3-6 months
- **'Group' questionnaire:** accessible & discussion-based format

Initial Long Term Questionnaire

### Initial Long Term Questionnaire

Brighton & Hove Food Partnership have asked The University of Essex to evaluate the benefits of community gardens in the city. As part of this evaluation, we are asking you to complete this initial questionnaire and will follow up with you again in the coming months. Your answers will help us understand the benefits people experience from attending community gardens so we can help more people to take part in future.

Taking part is voluntary and you do not have to answer the questions if you do not want to. If you can't answer a question just leave it and go onto the next question.

When you have completed the questionnaire please hand it back to the person who gave it to you. Thank you!

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1. I agree to take part in this research by completing questionnaires (please tick)

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2. Please read the following statements and tick the one that applies to you:

I am filling in the questionnaire about myself

I am a project worker or helper reading out the questions to the participant and filling in their responses

I am a carer/ guardian completing the questionnaire on behalf of someone else

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3. What gender do you identify with? 4. What age are you?

Male  Female  Transgender  Prefer not to say

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5a. Are your day-to-day activities affected by a health condition or disability which has lasted or is expected to last at least 12 months?

Yes  No  Prefer not to say

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5b. If yes, which of the following best describes your health condition or disability? (Please tick any that apply to you)

Physical disability

Sensory impairment

Learning disability/difficulty

Long-term illness

Autistic spectrum disorder

Mental health condition

Dementia

Alcohol and/or substance misuse

Unsure

Other (please specify)

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6. Which of the following best describes your current situation? (Please tick all that apply)

Employed

Unemployed

Retired

Carer

Student

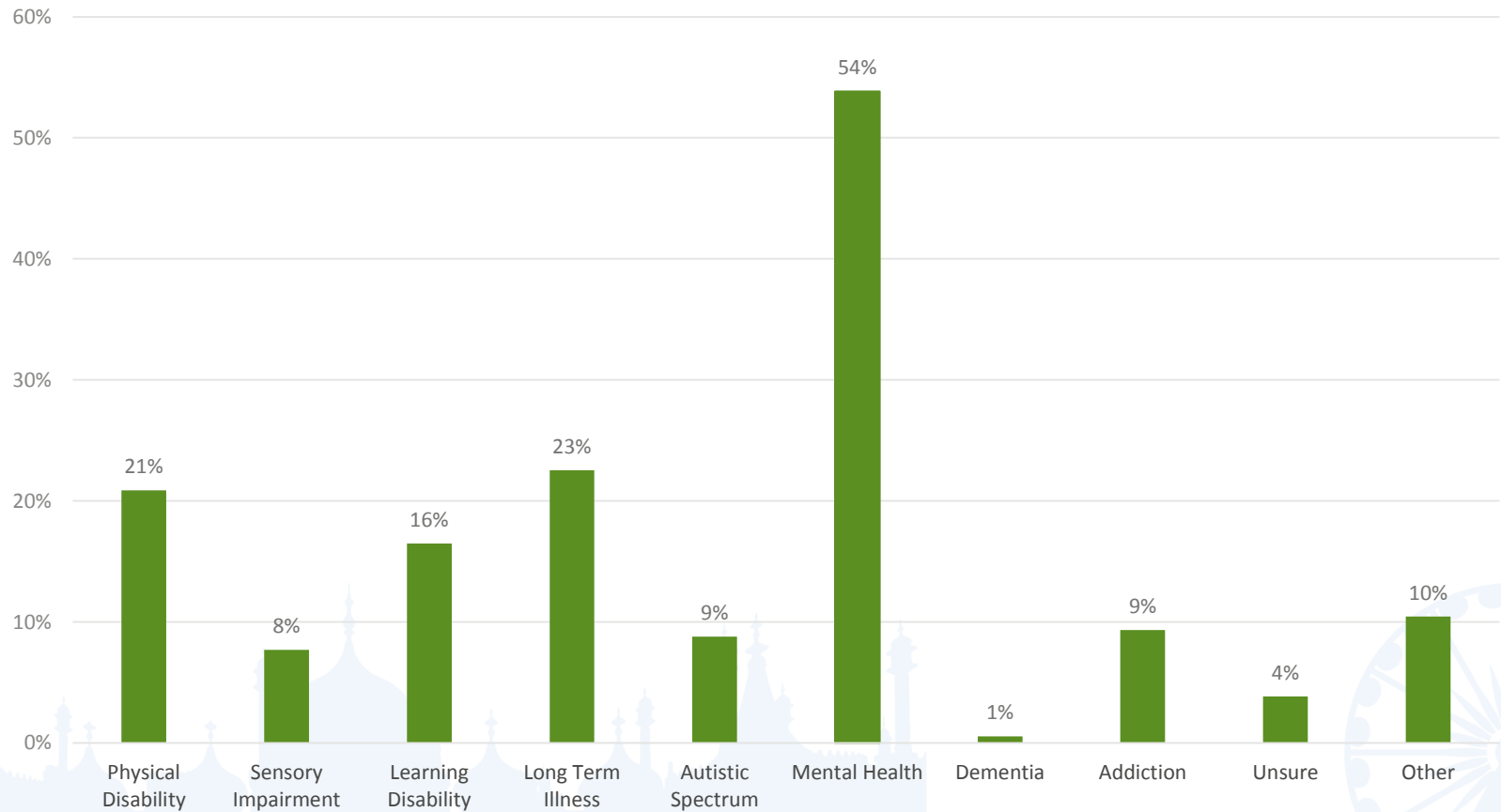
Homeless/vulnerably housed

Other (please specify)

Brighton & Hove  
**FOOD**  
 Partnership

# Results: who responded

Health conditions amongst vulnerable adults responding to questionnaires



(NB: Total of more than 100% due to respondents choosing more than one category to define themselves.)

# Results: Wellbeing

- 97% reported improved happiness, mood or wellbeing (sample size = 290)
- Statistically significant 11% increase in happiness after one session (sample size = 41 vulnerable adults, 12% significant increase for all participants, 82 sample)
- 88% reported that coming to the garden would have a long-term impact on them in future (sample size = 62)
- Statistically significant 16% improvement in life satisfaction after 3-6 months (sample size = 53 vulnerable adults, 6% significant increase for non-vulnerable participants, 37 sample)



“I suffer from anxiety and the gardening sessions are calming and boost my mood. I leave feeling more relaxed.”

“Sometimes when I am depressed I miss coming but I know that if I make the effort to get here I will instantly feel better.”

# Results: Physical health

- 89% reported improved physical health (sample size = 221)
- Statistically significant 13% average improvement in health for vulnerable adults. (sample size = 55 vulnerable adults)
- 10% to 17% increase in physical activity level for vulnerable adults (sample size = 54 vulnerable adults, greater impact for those with learning disabilities)
- 14% reported an increase in portions of fruit & veg consumed (sample size = 45 vulnerable adults, same results for overall sample of 84 people)



“Coming up to the allotment has influenced my diet changes. I now eat healthier food... Before I was coming to the allotment I was basically eating junk food.”

“I feel more confident, more healthy, I’m using every single muscle in my body. It’s exercise. I sleep better at night.”

# Results: Skills & confidence

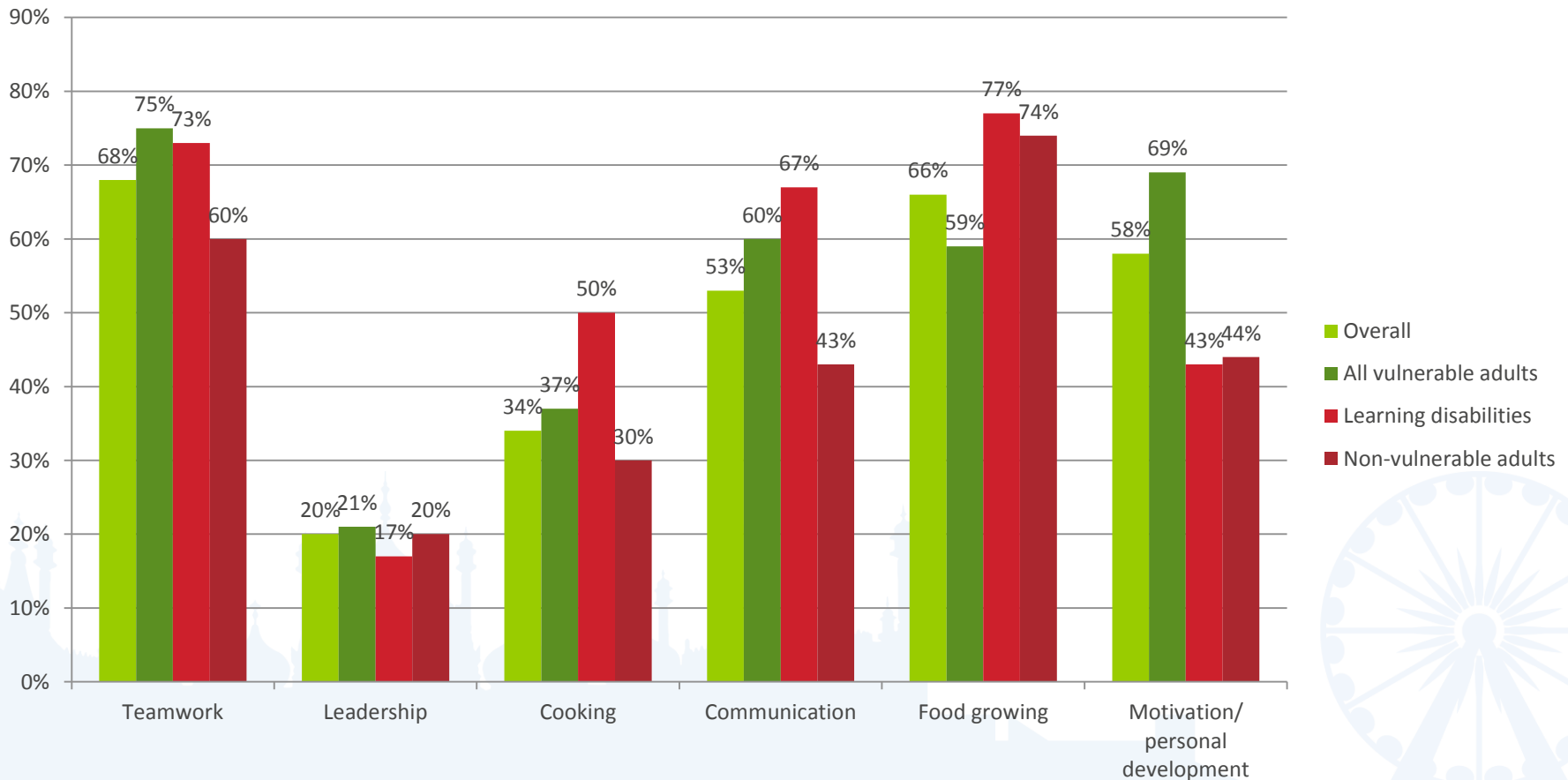
- 90% improved their skills or confidence (sample size = 296)
- Between 3% and 16% increases in self esteem (sample size = 28 vulnerable adults, greater impact for those with learning disabilities)
- 75% of vulnerable adults reported gaining teamwork skills (sample size = 116)
- 60% improved communication skills
- 69% gained motivation/ personal development skills.



“If I look back to how I was when I first started I have changed so much in my confidence and social skills so yes, that will change my future life.”

# Results: Skills & confidence

## Skills gained at community gardens for different client groups



# Cookery skills

- 26% increase in 'I enjoy putting effort & care into the food I eat'  
(sample size = 50 vulnerable adults)
- 29% increase in 'I often eat meals cooked from basic ingredients, either by myself or someone else.'  
(sample size = 49 vulnerable adults)
- 33% increase in 'I feel confident cooking & preparing my own meals.'  
(sample size = 51 vulnerable adults, 38% increase for adults with learning disabilities, sample size = 14)



"I want to do more cooking. I made flat bread for the first time today and I never knew I could do that!"

"The garden gives me confidence to try new foods and I'm more open minded... eg eating a bit of leaf."

# Nature connection

- 87% maintained or increased their contact with green space over 3-6 months  
(sample size = 52 vulnerable adults, 25% increased contact, 62% maintained)

- Statistically significant 19% increase in feeling connected to nature over 3-6 months  
(sample size = 53 vulnerable adults, statistically significant 13% increase for the whole sample, sample size = 89)



“This garden is great because it’s accessible for all types of people. If someone has a disability you can always find something for them to do. There’s not many environments that there is such a variety of things that need to be done, that there’s something that everybody can do.”

# Next steps

- Applying for further funding to develop the work
- Offering more structured therapeutic activities with transport provided to reach the most vulnerable
- Supporting more participants to take on leadership roles at gardens
- High interest in cookery activities for people with learning disabilities, pilot courses planned for 2018





# Thank you

To all the partners, referrers and volunteers  
who made this work possible.  
And the National Lottery Fund for  
supporting this work.

[www.bhfood.org.uk](http://www.bhfood.org.uk)

