Growing Well – Mental Health Recovery through Farming

An Evaluation of Performance and Impact – Year 2

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1. Executive Summary

Growing Well is a mental health support organisation based at Low Sizergh Farm, near Kendal in Cumbria. The organisation manages a 6 acre farm at Low Sizergh Farm as a horticultural business, delivering a range of products with the primary focus of supporting therapeutic vocational activities for adults experiencing mental health challenges.

In 2015 Growing Well secured BIG Lottery funding through the Reaching Communities programme to deliver a ‘Mental Health Recovery through Farming’ project aimed at supporting the mental health recovery of up to 120 adults. This document represents an evaluation of Year 2 of the three year Mental Health Recovery through Farming project.

Delivery in Year 2 largely exceeded Reaching Communities project targets, including the number of volunteers attending and the number of beneficiary days delivered. There was a slight shortfall against the anticipated number of training days delivered. In cumulative terms, the project has delivered impressive results and has exceeded the three-year project total target figure with regard to several outputs, by the end of Year 2.

During Year 2 of delivery, Growing Well developed in a number of ways including:

- The employment of an Occupational Therapist in June 2016, effectively doubling the resource for one-to-one and group support for volunteers.
- The employment of a Catering Coordinator to support the delivery of catering opportunities for volunteers.
- Introduction of hot lunches on volunteer activity days. Growing Well now provides hot lunches, mostly soups with homemade bread, for volunteers on each volunteer activity day.
- Introduction of volunteer activities on one additional day per week (Mondays)

A number of delivery aspects were identified as having contributed to the successful delivery in Year 2, which were also identified in Year 1, these included:

The flexible approach of Growing Well staff to delivery, including a range of new activities and opportunities offered in the year, with perhaps the most significant change in Year 2 being the introduction of volunteer activity days on Mondays.

The wrap-around nature of support offered by staff at Growing Well has again been a contributing factor to the success of the project, with volunteers citing the informal support during ‘down times’ as being as important to their recovery and continued
participation, as formal training or working activities. Notable informal support interventions included encouraging volunteers to chair daily meetings, involving volunteers in the planning of activities and encouraging volunteers to tell a ‘joke of the day’, has been augmented in Year 2 by the addition of hot, freshly prepared meals for volunteers and increased one-to-one support to overcome anxiety for volunteers who are not comfortable in group settings.

The positive use of peer support was again highlighted as an important element of delivery for volunteer mental health recovery and it was evident that peer support does not simply happen by chance, rather it is actively encouraged informally by Growing Well staff.

The use of the natural environment was again identified as important to mental health recovery, with Growing Well continuing to utilise the natural environment of its location to good effect, supporting volunteers to feel relaxed and engage with nature.

Having a diversity of working activities was again cited by volunteers as an important factor in supporting their mental health recovery, with volunteers identifying that performing different tasks in various settings around the site helps to retain their interest and keep them engaged. In Year 2 Growing Well introduced new volunteering and training activities including catering.

The intimate nature of Growing Well was again cited by volunteers as one of the things that the organisation does best, and is key to delivering personalised support to volunteers.

Feedback from volunteers through the interview process consistently praised both the commitment and approach of staff. A material change that may be identified in Year 2 was the increase in the size of the staff team. This enabled staff to dedicate more time to deliver one-to-one support with volunteers.

The second year of project delivery saw a number of developments to both the delivery and infrastructure at Growing Well. Developments identified as contributing to the successful delivery in Year 2 included:

The employment of two new frontline staff members – Growing Well secured additional funding to employ an Occupational Therapist to provide additional support to volunteers through a range of interventions including initial needs assessments which were then followed up by individualised interventions, such as graded and adapted support, to enable volunteers to engage in meaningful activities whilst on site. A Catering Coordinator was introduced in the year to develop catering activities for volunteers as a new addition to the volunteering offer. Interviews with volunteers...
during the evaluation process highlighted the high level of importance given to the work of both new staff members.

Introduction of new volunteering opportunities - New volunteering opportunities in catering were introduced in Year 2. Feedback from volunteers during interviews identified that the greater choice of opportunities, including activities that did not involve high levels of physical activity, were important and inspirational factors for volunteers.

Introduction of volunteer activities on Mondays – In Year 2, Growing Well introduced regular volunteer activity days on Mondays to add to their existing delivery days. The expansion of delivery to include Mondays was cited by several volunteers as being important in aiding their recovery.

Introduction of increased employment support – the additional staff resource at Growing Well enabled a more intensive support programme to be delivered for volunteers. The success of the support, demonstrated by three previous volunteers securing employment within the industry area of their studies, is testament to the delivery and the appropriateness of the support. This is a significant element in both the delivery of the project and perhaps in the development of Growing Well as an organisation.

Implementation of Social Impact Monitoring – Growing Well staff worked with a regeneration consultant in the year to assess their existing social impact monitoring methodologies and develop bespoke systems. The implementation of effective social impact management is a significant step for Growing Well and it will deliver robust data to enable the organisation to assess its performance and plan for improved delivery of increased social impacts.

Recommendations for the improvement of delivery in future years included adopting a formal co-production model, rationalising the scheduling of data collection, further enhancing the training and volunteering offer, introducing a ‘Topic of the Week’ for down times and meetings and increasing referrals to additional services. The evaluation also recommended that Growing Well should apply to Reaching Communities for the delivery of an enhanced three-year project.
2. Introduction to Growing Well

Growing Well is a mental health support organisation based at Low Sizergh Farm, near Kendal in Cumbria. Established in 2004 as an Industrial and Provident Society (IPS), the organisation operates as a non-profit-distributing social enterprise (BenCom) and has grown to become an established support agency in the area, receiving referrals from the local Community Mental Health Team, local GP surgeries and a range of additional sources.

Growing Well manages a 6 acre farm at Low Sizergh Farm as a horticultural business, delivering a range of products including local salad and vegetable produce for sale to local retailers in the community and via a community crop share scheme. The farm business supports therapeutic vocational activities for adults experiencing mental health challenges.

The social objectives of Growing Well are to:

- Develop the emotional resilience of people experiencing mental ill health
- Develop people’s life skills, through training and vocational activity
- Support people to be healthier and more active, reducing social isolation and increasing life expectancy.

The organisation engages its service users, called volunteers, in the day to day vocational activities involved in the operation of the farm, along with engaging both current and ex-volunteers in the governance of the organisation as Trustees. Volunteers may engage in a range of horticultural activities including seed propagation, land preparation, planting and sowing through to the harvesting of produce. A range of additional activities including catering and office work are also available for volunteers to participate in.

The organisation employs a Horticultural Therapist, a Social Worker and three Psychotherapists and 2 recovery specialists, in order to appropriately support people who are experiencing mental ill health. A Training Co-ordinator is employed to deliver Level 1, 2 and 3 work based horticultural qualifications along with practical training in work-based activities such as Tractor Driving. A Catering Coordinator supports training in catering skills and an Occupational Therapist supports volunteer needs.

Operating as a trading social enterprise, Growing Well generated approximately 21% of its income through commercial activities in the year to 31st December 2016 (latest accounts) with the remainder being derived from a range of grant and fundraising sources.
Over the past 12 months, Growing Well developed in a number of ways (the impacts of which are considered later within this report). Notable changes include:

- The employment of an Occupational Therapist in June 2016, effectively doubling the resource for one-to-one and group support for volunteers.
- The employment of a Catering Coordinator to support the delivery of catering opportunities for volunteers.
- Introduction of hot lunches on volunteer activity days. Growing Well now provides hot lunches, mostly soups with homemade bread, for volunteers on each volunteer activity day.
- Introduction of volunteer activities on one additional day per week (Mondays)
3. Mental Health Recovery through Farming

This document represents an evaluation of Year 2 of a three year Mental Health Recovery through Farming project. A summary of the project, as detailed in the Year 1 evaluation report, is outlined below:

In 2015 Growing Well secured BIG Lottery funding through the Reaching Communities programme to deliver a ‘Mental Health Recovery through Farming’ project aimed at supporting the mental health recovery of up to 120 adults.

The project beneficiaries include individuals across South Cumbria; those in deprived urban areas, particularly Barrow in Furness, and those in isolated rural areas who experience a range of mental illness, from depression and anxiety disorders, schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder to conditions such as eating disorders and personality disorders. The project has aims to target individuals with mental health issues who experience poor physical fitness, drug or alcohol dependency or are vulnerably housed, individuals who receive benefits from Jobcentre Plus, and experience significant financial hardship, who feel unable to return to work, due to poor mental resilience and work readiness.

Each day, up to 20 volunteers, actively supported by staff, collaborate with other team members to engage in a wide variety of tasks and responsibilities. The teams work between Monday and Thursday with volunteers choosing from a range of activities on offer. Each activity includes informal training tailored to meet the recovery needs of each individual.

With delivery from 2014 to 2017, the project aims to deliver the following activities (taken from the successful Reaching Communities application):

- ‘Ground preparation - weeding, digging vegetable beds, tractor use including harrowing and rotavating, land clearance
- Plant Preparation - seed germination, seedling propagation, potting on and watering
- Growing - planting, weeding, tending crops, harvesting produce
- Packing – grading and packing produce, distributing produce for customers
- Administration – answering and making phone calls, responding to email correspondence, preparing invoices, managing financial transactions, preparing and distributing marketing materials, using accounting software.
- Site maintenance – Maintaining and repairing site buildings, pruning trees.
- Non-growing activities - Beneficiaries will be supported and trained at a pace to suit individual recovery needs in a range of roles including greeting and
helping visitors, explaining growing techniques, mentoring new beneficiaries, taking full part in daily and monthly team meetings, representing beneficiaries interests at board meetings and in board sub-groups.

- **Training and progression** - These activities will support the achievement of work-based qualifications for beneficiaries. Additionally, whilst working on site, beneficiaries will be formally trained and assessed in the Level One Certificate in Horticulture. Beneficiaries will be informally supported to develop their communication skills; team working skills; group participation and workload/activity management and planning.

- **As their health improves they will be supported to move on from our activities to new work and life opportunities.** Beneficiaries will be given information and support to access further participation, volunteering, training, employment, leisure and health/wellbeing opportunities.

The project has the following Outcome targets (taken from the successful Reaching Communities application):

1. **Improved mental and physical wellbeing for 120 people (in total), experiencing mental distress, giving them IMPROVED LIFE CHANCES.**
2. **Delivering BETTER ACCESS TO TRAINING, with 60 of beneficiaries attaining qualifications; moving on to volunteering, training or employment.**
3. **At least 90 beneficiaries feeling less socially isolated and more hopeful and will therefore become HEALTHIER AND MORE ACTIVE PEOPLE.**

A total of £232,867 was awarded by Reaching Communities to deliver the project, to include an external evaluation of the performance of the project against project outcomes covering the three year delivery period.
4. Aims of the Evaluation

In November 2015 Growing Well issued an Evaluation Tender Specification detailing the requirements of an evaluation of the project. Symbiont Consulting Ltd, a North West-based research and development consultancy, was appointed in December 2015 to conduct the external evaluation.

Outcomes are to be evaluated annually, over a 36 month period, with evaluations delivering recommendations on how Growing Well may improve their delivery to deliver increased and sustained impact.

This report represents an external evaluation of Year 2 of project delivery from 1st February 2016 to 31st January 2017. Where appropriate, this report follows a similar format to the Year 1 evaluation report, in an attempt to provide consistency of format for the reader.

Consultation with staff at Growing Well identified the following key aims to the evaluation:

A) An assessment of Growing Well’s performance in achieving Mental Health Recovery through Farming project Outcomes, collating all information collected through Growing Well’s internal assessment processes and reporting on this data with reference to the stated Reaching Communities outcomes and indicators of achievement including:

Outcome 1:

- 20 People reporting reduced usage of NHS mental health services through the Client Services Receipt Inventory Questionnaire each year
- 30 People reporting improved mood and reduced anxiety through GAD7/PHQ 9 Questionnaire each year
- 120 People reporting increased optimism about their mental health recovery through monthly interview by the end of the project

Outcome 2:

- 10 People attaining recognised qualifications in Horticulture each year
- 10 people moving to further volunteering, training or employment as reported at time of leaving (exit interview) each year
• 60 People reporting greater confidence in their ability, skills and knowledge through monthly interview and use of CORS based questionnaire by the end of the project

Outcome 3:

• 20 People adopting a healthier lifestyle reported reporting monthly on agreed activity and food indicators each year
• 30 People reporting improved physical wellbeing through monthly interview (each year)
• 90 People regularly attending Growing Well demonstrating pro-active social interaction with others by the end of the project

B) The delivery of primary research to identify the sustained impact of Growing Well in delivering recovery support for participants.

Through consultation with staff and management at Growing Well it was agreed that the sustained impact research should be conducted in Years 1 and 3 only, to allow for sufficient passage of time to assess sustained impact. For this reason, no consultations with ex-volunteers are included in this Year 2 evaluation.
5. Evaluation Methodology

The methodology for the Year 2 evaluation was developed through discussions with Growing Well staff and management as commissioning body and Symbiont Consulting as external evaluator. The aims, anticipated outcomes, methodology and parameters of the evaluation were agreed, and evaluation methodology was set against an Evaluation Framework.

It was agreed by both parties that the evaluation should have three key deliverables:

- To provide a robust analysis of the performance of Growing Well in the delivery of the Mental Health Recovery through Farming project in 2016/17, set against the achievement of agreed project outcomes and indicators aligned to the Reaching Communities grant agreement
- To provide a comparative analysis of Year 2 delivery and performance against Year 1 results taken from the Year 1 evaluation.
- To deliver an insightful analysis of the reasons behind the level of success of Growing Well in delivering their current level of outcome achievement, and to offer recommendations on how the delivery may be improved

It was agreed that an evaluation of sustained impact should be conducted in Years 1 and 3 only as the evaluation aims to consider long-term impacts. For this reason, no consultations with ex-volunteers are included in this Year 2 evaluation.

The evaluation methodology employed a number of different research exercises aiming to draw upon the extant results of research conducted through Growing Well’s internal monitoring processes, along with primary research conducted with current. Alongside this, the evaluator participated in activities to gain insight into the day-to-day experience of volunteers and staff.

The following research processes were conducted:

5.1 Analysis of Existing Secondary Data:

**Growing Well Annual Performance Data** - Review and analysis of data taken from Growing Well’s internal management information system, identifying delivery data including numbers of volunteers, number of delivery days, activities delivered etc.

**Volunteer Questionnaires** - Review and analysis of results of Volunteer Questionnaires conducted with current volunteers during the project delivery period in Year 2. The questionnaire examined volunteers’ feelings on entering the project, whether they had set goals, had they achieved those goals, asked for comments on
which activities volunteers felt they particularly benefitted from, which they enjoyed/didn’t enjoy etc. Importantly, the questionnaire asked volunteers whether they felt that there have been changes to their mental health, what these changes were and whether and in which way they can attribute all or some of these changes to their time at Growing Well.

The organisation implemented a social impact monitoring regime in Year 2. It was agreed that data from this process would not be included in this Year 2 evaluation as a full 12 month data set was not available at the time of conducting the evaluation research.

5.2 Collection and Analysis of Primary Data:

Interviews & discussions with Management and Staff – the external evaluator conducted an interview with staff and management at Growing Well to inspect the results reported via BIG Lottery progress reports. The aims of this exercise were threefold; to interrogate the validity of the data, to gain an insight into the Management and Staff’s own interpretation of results, and to understand why and how Growing Well had achieved the reported results. Interviews were followed up with telephone conversations with staff to clarify elements of the report.

Interviews with Current Volunteers – a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted by the external evaluator with a selection of current volunteers. Potential participants were informed of the evaluation, given details of the nature of the interviews, and given date and time slots for interviews. Those wishing to participate then selected their own date and time slot for an interview to take place.

The interviews followed a similar format to those successfully conducted with current volunteers in the Year 1 evaluation, in order that results could be presented in a consistent format with Year 1 evaluation results. Survey questions were augmented by requesting volunteers to identify their feelings against a series of mental health indicators at the time of interview (utilising principles of Recovery Star methodology – Dickens, Geoff et al 2012).

With the advance permission of participants, interview notes were taken to ensure accuracy of quotes included in the evaluation report. All interviews were conducted in person and one a one-to-one basis, in a private training room at Growing Well, and interviewees were informed that all results and quotes presented within the Report would be anonymised.
5.3 Experiential Activities:

**Participation in working activities alongside volunteers** – during the research period, the evaluator participated in a range of activities alongside volunteers in an attempt to experience the day-to-day experience of volunteers and gain insight into the role and support offered by staff. The evaluator participated in a range of working activities including planting crops in polytunnels and potting seedlings in the potting shed and participated in daily team meetings.

**Informal engagement with staff and volunteers** – during the research period, the evaluator engaged with staff and volunteers in an informal manner. The evaluator observed daily team meetings, joined staff and volunteers for lunch and breaks. Informal observation and conversations with staff and volunteers provided an insight into the day to day working and culture of the organisation, and results of conversations have been included in this report.
6. Limitations of the Evaluation

In defining the parameters of the Year 2 evaluation, it was agreed that an evaluation of sustained impact should be conducted in Years 1 and 3 only as the evaluation aims to consider long-term impacts. For this reason, no consultations with ex-volunteers are included in this Year 2 evaluation.

The opportunity to actively participate in the evaluation through formal interview was offered to all current volunteers. Not all current volunteers chose to participate in interviews. The quotations used within this evaluation to illustrate findings have therefore been drawn from the sample of volunteers who chose to participate in interviews, along with comments from volunteer questionnaires.

The evaluation used information from small data sets. When conducting statistical analyses of small data sets, the end results may be influenced greatly by the readings of a small number of data. For this reason, no detailed statistical analysis is included within this evaluation, rather, percentages are utilised to explain simple variations in performance levels.
7. Quality Assurance

The evaluation was set against an agreed Evaluation Framework detailing methodology and deliverables.

The monitoring databases at Growing Well were inspected by the external evaluator as part of the Year 1 evaluation. The data held on a randomly selected volunteer, that had been used to feed into the BIG Lottery monitoring reports, was requested, produced and data were confirmed.

Sample sizes of volunteer data were not considered sufficiently large to deliver statistically valid results to confirm correlation with an appropriate degree of certainty. The analysis contained within the Evaluation Report does not, therefore, rely heavily on statistical analysis, rather it uses simple percentages to present data.

As with the evaluation of Year 1, care was taken by the evaluator to question output figures reported against indicators to ensure accuracy. An example of this relates to Outcome Indicator 2.1 which relates to the number of people attaining recognised qualifications in Horticulture. Where any individual attains a Level 1 qualification, then progresses to complete a Level 2 qualification, the Output is reported twice; this could lead to double-counting of outcomes. An explanation was provided to the BIG Lottery by Growing Well to accompany the monitoring report in Year 1, stating that the outcomes both relate to the same individual; this appears appropriate.

There is potential for duplication in reporting of outcomes across years, where a volunteer participates in Growing Well activities across years. Historically, the average time spent by volunteers with Growing Well is two years. Where a volunteer participates in activities in different years, their input to certain outcome indicators e.g. Outcome Indicator 3.3, will be counted in both years. It should be noted by the reader therefore, that cumulative figures for certain outcome indicators do not necessarily relate to the total number of volunteers supported over a period of two years, rather they relate to the cumulative number of volunteers supported ‘in each separate year’ (the same individual volunteer may be supported in multiple years).

During the interviews with staff it became apparent that there may be under-reporting against certain indicators, such as Outcome 1 Indicator 3. It was not possible to adjust the results at this stage, so the issue is highlighted within the analysis text and recommendation for the improvement of data collection and reporting is given within the Recommendations of this report.
8. Results and Analysis

In this Year 2 evaluation, results of research are presented with associated narrative analysis by the evaluator. Quotes and data resulting from primary research including interviews with staff and current volunteers and volunteer questionnaires is used to illustrate and validate the narrative analysis. This section considers Reaching Communities project targets, outcomes and indicators specifically.

8.1 Reaching Communities Project Targets

This section considers basic Project Targets for Year 2, including the number of delivery days and training days delivered, along with the number of regular attendees.

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<tr>
<th>Reaching Communities target description</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Achieved</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of volunteers regularly attending Growing Well</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of beneficiary activity days delivered</td>
<td>2040</td>
<td>2278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of training days delivered</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reaching Communities targets for Year 2 were exceeded with regards to the number of volunteers attending and the number of beneficiary days delivered, the target for the number of training days delivered was not met.

Year 2 of project delivery saw a total of 68 volunteers access project activities on a regular basis (regular attendance is classed as volunteers attending for a minimum period of 3 months); this figure exceeds the project target of 30 regularly attending volunteers. A total of 2278 beneficiary days were delivered for volunteers, which exceeds the annual project target of 2040. The target number of training days delivered reached 355 for the year, which falls short of the annual project target of 600.

A comparative analysis of performance in Years 1 and 2 against the number of volunteers regularly attending Growing Well is represented in Figure 1, also showing performance on a cumulative basis across both years.
In Year 2 of delivery, Growing Well reported a total of 68 volunteers regularly attending their services. This figure exceeds the target figure of 30 volunteers by 126%. As outlined in the Quality Assurance text, this total figure of 68 volunteers participating regularly in the year included a number of volunteers who had also participated in Year 1 and had previously been reported to Reaching Communities. The project has exceeded targets in both Years 1 and 2, with a cumulative total of 120 volunteers attending. This figure, even accounting for potential duplication in reporting, is far in excess of the forecast cumulative two-year target figure of 60 volunteers attending, exceeding it by 100% over the first two years of delivery. The figure exceeds the project lifetime target of 90 volunteers regularly attending and represents a major success for the project.

The number of volunteers regularly attending Growing Well services in Year 2 has increased by 16, an increase of some 30%. Interviews with staff and volunteers suggest there may be a number of reasons for the level of success in achieving the high participation rate including:

- Recruitment of additional staff – the staff compliment at Growing Well was increased by the recruitment of two new staff members within the year. The additional staff compliment resulted in increased resources available for non-vocational activity support i.e. one-to-one and group sessions focussed on individual aspects of recovery. The additional resource also enabled more ad hoc one-to-one support as required by volunteers, along with the identification of issues that prevent volunteers from attending and setting in place specific
interventions to address these issues, such as providing specific seating at lunch and meeting times to help volunteers to overcome anxiety.

Comments from one volunteer who had participated in both Years 1 and 2 included:

‘The support is much better now that we have one-to-one support. I know that supervision is also a time to talk, but the one-to-ones seem more ‘individual’; I know that there is always someone to talk to when the [new staff member] is around. I’ve been in other support services where there wasn’t much individual support, and I always felt part of a nameless group’.

- Provision of a minibus pick up and drop off service - The service makes a number of schedules stops at locations in communities that are accessible to volunteers.

One volunteer commented:

‘The minibus service has helped me a lot. Public transport can get a bit busy and I feel self-conscious, especially if I’m covered in mud. It really helps me to know that I have a minibus to meet me in the morning and bring me to Growing Well’.

- Increased activity offer – the training offer at Growing Well was diversified in the year to incorporate volunteering opportunities in catering and administration, to augment the existing training and activities in areas such as Tractor Driving.

Comments from volunteers included:

‘The training is something for me to work towards; I know that if I work at it I will be able to eventually work towards my Level 2 qualification, which is professionally recognised. I’d like to get a job when I’m ready and I know that having a Level 2 will help me to get a job’.

‘The homework with the training has been brilliant, it gives me a focus when I am at home’.

- Introduction of hot lunches on volunteer activity days – Growing Well now provides hot lunches, mostly soups with homemade bread, for volunteers on each volunteer activity day. Meals are prepared mostly by volunteers who are participating in catering opportunities, and meals are taken as a group in one of the yurts on site.
Comments from volunteers included:

‘When it’s cold and wet outside on the farm, which it often is here in winter, it’s great to know that we’ll get a hot meal and can sit in the yurt and warm up with our soup’.

‘It makes a big difference being given a proper meal, ‘cos sometimes I wouldn’t bother making a meal for myself at home and would probably only have brought butties, if anything’.

‘I really look forward to lunch now’.

A comparative analysis of performance in Years 1 and 2 against the number of beneficiary activity days delivered is represented in Figure 2, also showing performance on a cumulative basis across both years.

**Figure 2: Number of beneficiary activity days delivered in Years 1 and 2**

The figure reported for the number of beneficiary activity days delivered in Year 2, totalling 2278, exceeded the annual target by 12%. This should be recognised as a considerable success for the organisation and reflects changes made to project delivery to incorporate the delivery of volunteer activities on an additional weekday (Mondays).

On a comparative basis, the project increased the number of delivery days in Year 2 by 20% and the cumulative total now exceeds the two year cumulative target by 2%.
The project appears to be on track to achieve the three year cumulative target of 6,120 beneficiary activity days delivered.

Comments from volunteers included:

‘The flexibility of Growing Well is really important to me. Being able to come in on different days if I need to really helps. Previously, if I missed a week or two I started to feel ‘out of it’ but the extra Monday of activities means that I hardly ever miss a week now’.

A comparative analysis of performance in Years 1 and 2 against the number of training days delivered is represented in Figure 2, also showing performance on a cumulative basis across both years.

Figure 3: Number of training days delivered in Years 1 and 2

The number of training days delivered in Year 2 was reported as 355 in total, which falls short of the target by 41%. The Year 2 total also shows a decrease of 49% in delivery against the output achieved in Year 1.

Interviews with senior management identified that this decrease in performance level is largely due to the delayed commencement of Level 2 training. The training was due to commence in September 2016 but was delayed by 5 months, and therefore falls outside of Year 2. On a cumulative basis, the project has delivered 87% of the two year target of 1,200 training days, and with the increased level of training now
offered, the project appears to have the potential to achieve the three year cumulative total of 1,800 training days delivered.

One volunteer commented:

‘The cooking training is brilliant; I really enjoy making a meal from scratch and I’m starting to cook properly at home now, using raw ingredients. It’s got to be a lot healthier’.
8.2 Reaching Communities Project Outcomes

It this section, Project Outcomes are considered, each having three separate Indicators against which results are assessed to identify levels of Outcome achievement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaching Communities Outcome 1: Improved mental and physical wellbeing for people experiencing mental distress, giving them improved life chances.</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 1.1: Number of people reporting reduced usage of NHS mental health services through the Client Services Receipt Inventory Questionnaire.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indicator 1.2: Number of people reporting improved mood and reduced anxiety through GAD7/PHQ9 Questionnaire.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 1.3: Number of people reporting increased optimism about their mental health recovery through monthly interview.</td>
<td>120 over a 3 year period</td>
<td>28</td>
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**Indicator 1.1: Number of people reporting reduced usage of NHS mental health services through the Client Services Receipt Inventory Questionnaire.**

The number of people reporting reduced usage of NHS Mental Health services reached a total of 20 in Year 2, achieving 100% of the target of 20 for the year.

As in Year 1, there is potential for the achievement level reported against this indicator to be under-reported. A recommendation has been included within this report to ensure that data is collected accurately from all volunteers to enable an accurate achievement figure to be reported in Year 3. The organisation has now adopted Recovery Star methodology to replace the previous systems and a recommendation has been included in this report to schedule both Recovery Star and volunteer questionnaire assessments to provide data as close to the end of Year 3 as possible, to support the accurate reporting of achievement figures. A recommendation has also been included to include a question relating to this Outcome in exit interview questionnaires which should also be conducted via telephone, should a volunteer exit the project without giving sufficient notice to conduct an exit interview on a face-to-face basis.
A comparative analysis of performance in Years 1 and 2 against the number of volunteers reporting reduced usage of NHS mental health services is represented in Figure 4, also showing performance on a cumulative basis across both years.

**Figure 4: Number of people reporting reduced usage of NHS mental health services in Years 1 and 2**

![Bar chart showing number of people reporting reduced usage of NHS mental health services](image)

The achievement level of 20 against this indicator represents an increase of 43% against the Year 1 total. In cumulative terms, the project has achieved 85% of the two year target, having achieved a total of 34 volunteers reporting reduced usage of NHS mental health services against a cumulative target of 40.

Conversations with volunteers identified a number of ways in which their participation at Growing Well had reduced their usage of NHS mental health services, with volunteers consistently citing the warm and accessible approach of staff as a key issue, along with the relaxed and supporting environment created on a day to day basis at the site.
Comments from volunteers included:

‘I’ve stopped drinking now, so I’m not seeing the specialist. I don’t need booze to cheer me up; I come here (Growing Well) and listen to the birds singing, get my hands dirty and have a chat with everyone’.

‘It’s even the simple things here, like being given leaflets on how to help you sleep. I’ve tried a few things and they seem to be working so I haven’t been back to the doctors’.

‘Growing Well has a kind of commune feel to it, it’s not at all commercial, it’s set back and it doesn’t feel medical. I think this type of support is the most effective for me at the moment’.

**Indicator 1.2: Number of people reporting improved mood and reduced anxiety through GAD7/PHQ9 Questionnaire.**

The number of volunteers reporting improved mood and reduced anxiety in Year 2 totalled 38, exceeding the annual target of 30 by 27%. As with results relating to Outcome Indicator 1.1, there is potential for the achievement level reported against this indicator to be under-reported, and the actual level of achievement to be higher in practice. A recommendation has been included in this report to schedule both Recovery Star and volunteer questionnaire assessments to provide data as close to the end of Year 3 as possible, and to include a question relating to this Outcome in exit interview questionnaires which should also be conducted via telephone, should a volunteer exit the project without giving sufficient notice to conduct an exit interview on a face-to-face basis.

A comparative analysis of performance in Years 1 and 2 against the number of volunteers reporting improved mood and reduced anxiety is represented in Figure 5, also showing performance on a cumulative basis across both years.
The achievement level of 38 against this indicator represents an increase of 31% against the Year 1 total, and in cumulative terms, the project is 12% ahead of the two year target, having achieved a total of 67 volunteers reporting improved mood and reduced anxiety against a cumulative target of 60.

The results of initial stages of social impact monitoring implemented in 2016 appear to point towards increased resilience among volunteers, pointing towards volunteers having increased ability to deal with anxiety, rather than levels of anxiety decreasing per se. Consultations identified that staff have conducted explicit conversations with volunteers in an attempt to identify triggers of anxiety in individual volunteers, promoting open dialogue around the issue. This appears to have resulted in volunteers having improved recognition of when and how anxiety arises. The organisation is then able to work with the volunteers to deliver support through a flexible ‘menu’ of activities that relieve anxiety when it arises.
One volunteer commented:

*I am able to spot them (anxiety triggers) more clearly now. I can see it and recognise it, and I know that I’m starting to get anxious. I speak to [a staff member] and they move me to an activity that helps me; sometime that might be potting plants ‘cos I can listen to the radio whilst working and that calms me down’.*

**Indicator 1.3: Number of people reporting increased optimism about their mental health recovery through monthly interview.**

The total number of people reporting increased optimism about their mental health recovery through monthly interview totalled 28 in Year 2, which is 12 below the mean annual total. This shortfall of 30% is significant, however, interviews with staff and volunteers suggest that the lack of optimism is influenced primarily by factors external to Growing Well, and that are somewhat out of their sphere of influence. Factors identified by volunteers included Brexit, benefit cuts, difficulty in navigating benefit systems/forms, job shortages and the rising cost of living.

A comparative analysis of performance in Years 1 and 2 against the number of volunteers reporting increased optimism about their mental health through monthly interview is represented in Figure 6, also showing performance on a cumulative basis across both years.
The number of volunteers reporting increased optimism about their mental health fell by 28% in the period, from 39 in Year 1 to 28 in Year 2. In cumulative terms, the project has achieved a two year total of 67 volunteers reporting increased optimism about their mental health, achieving 56% of the three year project target.

When asked during one-to-one interviews to describe how they felt about their mental health recovery, volunteer comments included:

‘I know I’m getting there, it’s just going to take time’.

‘I feel great while I’m at here (at Growing Well), but then life seems to take over sometimes and I notice more of the negative stuff, stuff on telly etc’.

‘I worry about lots of different things; whether the bus will be on time, whether I will miss an appointment etc’…
Reaching Communities Outcome 2: Improved life skills and personal development for people facing discrimination, through better access to training, volunteering and employment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 2.1: Number of people attaining recognised qualifications in Horticulture.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 2.2: Number of people moving to further volunteering, training or employment as reported at time of leaving (exit interview)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 2.3: Number of people reporting greater confidence in their ability, skills and knowledge through monthly interview and use of CORS based questionnaire reporting increased optimism about their mental health recovery through monthly interview.</td>
<td>60 over a 3 year period</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Indicator 2.1: Number of people attaining recognised qualifications in Horticulture.**

A total of 10 volunteers achieved a recognised qualification in Horticulture in Year 2, with five volunteers gaining Level 1 qualifications and five volunteers achieving Level 2 qualifications. A further 2 volunteers achieved recognised qualifications in Tractor Driving.

A comparative analysis of performance in Years 1 and 2 against the number of volunteers people attaining recognised qualifications in Horticulture (and other subjects) is represented in Figure 7, also showing performance on a cumulative basis across both years.
The number of volunteers achieving recognised qualifications fell slightly in Year 2 from 14 to 12, a decrease of 14%. The cumulative total over Years 1 and 2 has reached a total of 26 volunteers achieving recognised qualifications, which is 30% above the cumulative total.

The team at Growing Well recognises that the offer of training in different subject areas can be a ‘hook’ for volunteers, and is often viewed as a means to achieving goals e.g. securing employment. The achievement of qualifications in itself is an aspirational goal for volunteers, whereby successful achievement leading to progression represents a tangible success for volunteers.

One volunteer commented:

*I've finished my Level 1 qualification now and this has given me confidence in myself because I know that I 'can' succeed and achieve. I'm looking at doing my Level 2 now*.

The achievement of qualifications and progression into work are not the only goal for volunteers, with several volunteers stating that participation in training and learning new skills is, in itself, beneficial to their mental health recovery.
Comments from volunteers included:

‘Instead of being called a ‘doley’, the training means that I am working towards employment, so I now call myself a Landscape Gardener on Facebook and I feel better about myself’.

‘I’ve used alternative services and taken other courses, such as arts and crafts. Growing Well is different, the training is progressive, it pushes me! I apply the skills I’ve learned in my own garden, so the training is useful in my everyday life too’.

‘I don’t feel ready for work yet, I know I will one day though. For now I want to concentrate on my recovery, and the training is helping me to do that’.

The diversification of the training offer in Year 2, to now offer Food Safety with associated catering activities, appears to be extremely valued by volunteers. During interviews with volunteers, it became apparent that a wider range of training subject areas would be welcomed by volunteers, and when pressed to offer suggestions as to exactly what type of subject areas volunteers would like Growing Well to provide training in, responses included Conservation Skills, Wildlife Identification, Wildlife Management, Dry Stone Walling, Beekeeping, Wild Food Foraging (linked to catering activities), Bushcraft, Chainsaw Proficiency.

Comments from volunteers included:

‘I think we should use the resources we have around us more; why can’t we have sessions in the woodland, doing woodland management or wild food foraging’?

‘Every time I sit here I look at the stone wall and think how beautiful it is but what a shame that it’s falling down. We should all do some training and repair it; I’d love that’!

‘I’d like chainsaw training; the more training the better actually’.
Indicator 2.2: Number of people moving to further volunteering, training or employment as reported at time of leaving (exit interview)

The total number of people moving to further volunteering, training or employment as reported at time of leaving in Year 2 was 18, which is 80% above the annual target of 10 volunteers.

In Year 2, three volunteers who left Growing Well with industry recognised qualifications in Horticulture have secured employment within the industry. The fact that volunteers have secured employment within the industry that their training at Growing Well relates to is a testament to the quality of vocational training provided and it should be recognised as an indicator of how the organisation has evolved and grown its services from primarily delivering mental health recovery, to the provision of mental health recovery with greater emphasis than before on progression. This represents the evolution of the organisation to the delivery of a more sophisticated programme of support, which appears to be providing more positive results for volunteers; this in turn is likely to deliver a greater level of positive social impact.

One volunteer commented:

I want to get a job, I want to get back out there, so I’ll take all the support I can get! It’s been quite a while since I last worked, really, and I was scared of it at first, but now I really want to try again, but this time I want to do something that I enjoy.

A comparative analysis of performance in Years 1 and 2 against the number of volunteers moving into further volunteering, training or employment, as reported at the time of leaving, is represented in Figure 8, also showing performance on a cumulative basis across both years.
In cumulative terms, the figure totals 49 volunteers moving into further volunteering, training or employment, as reported at the time of leaving. This cumulative figure is 145% above the cumulative target at the end of Year 2. The figure for Year 2 is 42% lower than the figure reported in Year 1, however, it represents a real success for the organisation.

**Indicator 2.3: Number of people reporting greater confidence in their ability, skills and knowledge through monthly interview and use of CORS based questionnaire reporting increased optimism about their mental health recovery through monthly interview.**

A total of 30 volunteers reported greater confidence in their ability, skills and knowledge in Year 2, which represents an achievement level of 150% against the mean average annual target of 20 per year.

Growing Well established activities in catering skills in Year 2 along with initial needs assessments and one-to-one support from an Occupational Therapist to support individual needs. This development provides an additional opportunity for volunteers.
to gain skills in a different area, and also provide additional opportunities to discuss how they feel about their levels of ability, skills and knowledge.

A comparative analysis of performance in Years 1 and 2 against the number of volunteers reported greater confidence in their ability, skills and knowledge is represented in Figure 9, also showing performance on a cumulative basis across both years.

**Figure 9: Number of volunteers reported greater confidence in their ability, skills and knowledge in Years 1 and 2**

![Figure 9: Number of volunteers reported greater confidence in their ability, skills and knowledge in Years 1 and 2](image)

The total achievement figure of 18 volunteers reporting greater confidence in their skills, ability and knowledge in Year 2 is lower than the figure of 35 reported in Year 1. On cumulative terms, the project has achieved a total of 53 which is approximately 33% ahead of the mean target for the first two years of project delivery and only 6 volunteers sort of the overall 3 year project target.

Interviews with staff at Growing Well identified that the organisational developments in Year 2 provide greater opportunities for volunteers to grow and work towards achieving their goals, be they mental health recovery or progression to volunteering, additional training and employment.
Reaching Communities Outcome 3: People with mental health problems being healthier and more active, reducing social isolation and increasing hopefulness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator 3.1: Number of people adopting a healthier lifestyle reporting monthly on agreed activity and food indicators</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 3.2: Number of people reporting improved physical wellbeing through monthly interview.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 3.3: Number of people regularly attending Growing Well demonstrating pro-active social interaction with others.</td>
<td>90 over a 3 year period</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Indicator 3.1: Number of people adopting a healthier lifestyle reporting monthly on agreed activity and food indicators**

The achievement figure for the total number of volunteers adopting a healthier lifestyle reporting monthly on agreed activity and food indicators was 25 in Year 2, which exceeds the target figure of 20 by 5, representing a 20% over-achievement for the year.

In Year 2 Growing Well introduced hot meals for volunteers and staff on volunteer activity days. Primarily consisting of a range of soups made from fresh local produce supplemented with homemade bread, the meals ensure that volunteers are offered a healthy and nutritious meal on each activity day spent with Growing Well. Furthermore, training in Food Safety and catering activities has equipped a number of volunteers with the skills to prepare healthy meals for themselves at home.

Staff at Growing Well employ a number of methods to encourage volunteers to make positive adjustments to their lifestyles, in an effort to support volunteers to make their lifestyles healthier. Examples of this include positive relevant articles and new features on noticeboards, encouraging volunteer participation in a number of external activities and handing out leaflets providing information on how to achieve a sound night’s sleep. This approach appears to be welcomed by volunteers, with one volunteer commenting:
"The information on sleeping better was brilliant. I’ve tried to put some of the ideas into practice and I think I’m sleeping better. I think we should have more stuff like this, maybe make time to discuss a different issue each week. Maybe we could take it in turns raising issues and then have a session the following week where we all try to find solutions."

From observations and participation in volunteer activities, break/lunch periods and team meetings, it became apparent that staff at Growing Well encourage the exchange of ideas between staff and volunteers, and from volunteer to volunteer. The exchange extended from the sharing of recipes and cooking methods, to the trading of fruit trees for flowering plants. In fostering this level of open exchange, staff at Growing Well have engendered a spirit of peer support, whereby volunteers feel confident enough to both ask their peers for support, and offer their opinions to help others. During interviews, volunteers commented on the importance of the supportive and sharing environment:

There is always somebody who can tell me how to do things I’m stuck with, tell me what I’m doing wrong with my plants or give me tips on how to grow better. We all have different skills!

There’s no stigma here to talk openly about my problems. I don’t feel stupid asking questions that I know probably are stupid, and somebody always tries to help, sometimes it’s staff or the OT, sometimes it might be another volunteer.

A comparative analysis of performance in Years 1 and 2 against the number of volunteers adopting a healthier lifestyle reporting monthly on agreed activity and food indicators represented in Figure 10, also showing performance on a cumulative basis across both years.
In comparative terms, the project delivered similar numbers of volunteers adopting a healthier lifestyle in Year 1 where a total of 27 volunteers were reported. In cumulative terms, the project is ahead of the two year target of 40, having achieved a two year total of 52, representing a 30% over-achievement level at the end of year 2

**Indicator 3.2: Number of people reporting improved physical wellbeing through monthly interview.**

A total of 35 volunteers reported improved physical wellbeing through monthly interview in Year 2, which is approximately 83% of the target figure of 30 for the year.

The activities that volunteers participate in at Growing Well includes a number of physically challenging tasks, from weeding and digging over beds, to site maintenance. Given the physical nature of the activities, it is, perhaps, surprising that a higher proportion of volunteers did not report experiencing improved physical
This is perhaps further surprising given the efforts that staff make to encourage volunteers to adopt healthy lifestyles.

On discussing the level of achievement against this indicator with staff and management at Growing Well, the consensus was that there was considerable under-reporting due to the previous data collection methodology. The figures reported against this indicator will be picked up in Year 3 via implementation of the Recovery Star methodology, which should deliver more robust results.

A comparative analysis of performance in Years 1 and 2 against the number of volunteers reporting improved physical wellbeing is represented in Figure 11, also showing performance on a cumulative basis across both years.

**Figure 11. Number of volunteers reporting improved physical wellbeing in Years 1 and 2**

The achievement figure against this indicator dropped from 28 in Year 1 to 25 in Year 2, a reduction of approximately 10% in real terms. On a cumulative basis, the two year total is slightly behind the mean two year target, standing at 53 against a target of 60.
Indicator 3.3: Number of people regularly attending Growing Well demonstrating pro-active social interaction with others.

The total number of volunteers attending Growing Well and demonstrating pro-active social interaction with others has been reported as 68 for Year 2, exceeding the annual target figure of 30 volunteers by 126%. The figure reported equates to the total number of volunteers attending the project in the year, as all volunteers are encouraged to interact socially during meetings, activities, breaks and meal times. As outlined in the Quality Assurance text, this total figure of 68 volunteers includes a number of volunteers who had also demonstrated pro-active social interaction in Year 1 and had previously been reported to Reaching Communities.

Growing Well fosters a supportive and open environment for volunteers, which creates a relaxed atmosphere for volunteers to interact with each other over working activities, in a meeting room, across a dining table or sitting outdoors around a picnic table. The supportive environment enables volunteers to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences, as witnessed by the External Evaluator during experiential observation.

Maintaining relatively small cohorts of volunteers and encouraging volunteers to work in small groups appears to be valued by volunteers, in fostering a sharing environment and active group dynamics.

Comments from volunteers included:

‘My favourite thing about being here is the social aspect; I love just getting out of the house, coming here and meeting people. I can trust everyone and speak without worrying about what people think of me, ‘cos we all have our own issues’.

‘Speaking with other people has made me realise what the root of my problems are, and I reckon that’s really important’.

‘There are usually about a dozen of us here and that’s just right I think, and working in small groups is good because we end up having really good conversations in small groups’.

‘Small groups is good’.

I like meeting like-minded people here. There is still a stigma about mental health. Chatting with people here, I don’t feel ashamed’.
A comparative analysis of performance in Years 1 and 2 against the number of volunteers demonstrating pro-active social interaction with others is represented in Figure 12, also showing performance on a cumulative basis across both years.

**Figure 12. Number of volunteers demonstrating pro-active social interaction with others in Years 1 and 2**

![Bar chart showing number of volunteers in Years 1 and 2 and cumulative across both years.]

The total number of volunteers demonstrating pro-active interaction with others has exceeded targets in both Years 1 and 2, with a cumulative total of 120 volunteers. The number of volunteers demonstrating pro-active social interaction with others in Year 2 has increased by 16, an increase of some 30%. In cumulative terms, the project has exceeded the two year mean target by 100% over the first two years of delivery. Indeed, the two year cumulative figure has exceeded the project lifetime target of 90 volunteers by the end of Year 2.
9. Discussion

This section aims to consider factors contributing to Growing Well’s level of performance in delivering the project in Year 2, however, as an evaluation of the second year of delivery towards a three year project, this section focusses primarily on what has changed in Year 2 and what has been the impact on achievement levels within the year.

Delivering positive impacts

The project has, for the second year running, achieved impressive results against Reaching Communities project targets and outcomes. Participation levels have again been reported at levels far in excess of the target figure and indeed the three-year project total target figure has already been achieved, by the end of Year 2.

In terms of achievement against Reaching Communities Outcome Indicators, the project has achieved 7 of 9 Indicators, exceeding target figures for 6 of the Indicators. Notable successes include the number of volunteers achieving recognised qualifications and the number of volunteers moving on to further volunteering, training and employment. Achievements also of note include the number of volunteers reporting greater confidence in their ability, skills and knowledge, and the number of volunteers adopting a healthier lifestyle.

It was noted in the Year 1 evaluation that the ‘multi-faceted nature of delivery at Growing Well’ has a key role to play in the success of the project; it is evident from the results that this approach is key to the project’s success in Year 2. It should be noted that staff at Growing Well appear to recognise the importance of supporting the development of the individual as a whole, in achieving mental health recovery. This is perhaps best explained by Onken, Dumont, Ridgway, Dornan, and Ralph (2002) stating that ‘Recovery is a product of dynamic interaction among characteristics of the individual (the self/ the whole person, hope/ sense of meaning/ purpose), characteristics of the environment (basic material resources, social relationships, meaningful activities, peer support, formal services, formal service staff), and the characteristics of the exchange (hope, choice/ empowerment, independence/ interdependence’).

As in the evaluation of Year 1, volunteers reported a range of factors relating to their participation at Growing Well that have contributed to their progress. Many of these
Factors were discussed at length in the Year 1 evaluation and this Year 2 evaluation does not aim to discuss these factors in full detail (as this information already exists within the Year 1 evaluation). This report aims to re-visit these factors, consider their contribution to volunteers’ progress, and focuses discussion on what has changed in Year 2 and what additional contributing factors are new to the level of achievement in Year 2.

Factors identified as contributing to volunteers’ progress and the success of the project, as identified in the Year 1 evaluation:

**Flexibility in Delivery** – The flexibility of the delivery of support provided by Growing Well was an important factor in the successful delivery of the project in Year 2, as cited by several volunteers during interviews.

What has changed: In Year 2, Growing Well complimented their existing offer with a range of new activities and resources, including improved access to the site, and an increased staff compliment. As such, the organisation was able to offer greater flexibility in the personalised support offered to individuals and to the choice of activities and training offered (many of these issues are discussed individually later in this discussion section).

Perhaps the most significant change in Year 2 has been the introduction of volunteer activity days on Mondays; the impacts of this are discussed later in this Section. This expansion of delivery was cited by several volunteers as being important, with volunteers noting that being able to attend on an additional or alternative day of the week enabled them to pursue other activities outside of Growing Well, which were aiding their recovery.

**Wrap-around Support** – The nature of support offered by staff at Growing Well has again been a contributing factor to the success of the project, with volunteers citing the informal support during ‘down times’ as being as important to their recovery and continued participation, as formal training or working activities.

What has changed: The informal support, including such interventions as encouraging volunteers to chair daily meetings, involving volunteers in the planning of activities and encouraging volunteers to tell a ‘joke of the day’, has been augmented in Year 2 by the addition of hot, freshly prepared meals for volunteers and increased one-to-one support to overcome anxiety for volunteers who are not comfortable in group settings.

Certain elements of support were raised by numerous volunteers during interviews as being important to their recovery and progression and having improved in Year 2,
these being the addition of improved one-to-one support (delivered by the Occupational Therapist and Volunteer Support Manager), support with progression to employment, and the enhanced offer of varied volunteering opportunities. The second and third points were highlighted as motivational to volunteers, indeed training and volunteering opportunities in different subject areas was highlighted as important to volunteers who had not actually commenced training in different areas, but saw it as an aspirational aim.

**Peer Support** – As highlighted within the results section of this report, Growing Well staff encourage volunteers to support each other wherever possible. This was highlighted as an important element of delivery for volunteer recovery in Year 1 and has again been highlighted by volunteers as being key to their recovery in Year 2. Peer support is recognised (Solomon 2004) as delivering considerable benefits for patients in mental health recovery, particularly in areas including self-esteem, self-efficacy, social support, spiritual well-being, and psychiatric symptoms (Fukui, Davidson, Holter, Rapp 2010). Repper and Carter (2011) highlight the importance of efficient management, training and supervision in the effective facilitation of peer support mechanisms to support mental health recovery, and the professionalism of staff at Growing Well should be recognised.

What has changed: Through observations and experiential participation alongside volunteers conducted by the External Evaluator during the Year 2 evaluation, it was evident that peer support does not simply happen by chance, rather it is actively encouraged informally by Growing Well staff. Outside of the formal ‘buddy’ process, staff actively encourage volunteers to share their experiences, often by raising an issue that has been highlighted as being of importance or interest to a particular volunteer, and promoting conversation between volunteers around the topic. Staff encourage volunteers to share their solutions to issues with their peers and to be open and honest; this approach is highly valued by volunteers and appears to deliver highly positive results. The beneficial role played by social ties in supporting the maintenance of psychological well-being appears was identified by Kawachi and Berkman (2001), a viewpoint supported by Lin, Ye and Ensel (1999) who argued that ‘participation and involvement in community and social relations’ in themselves were beneficial to supporting mental wellbeing, and staff at Growing Well appear to nurture participation and social bonding in daily routines on site.

**Use of the Natural Environment** – As identified in the Year 1 evaluation, volunteers identified the importance to their mental health recovery of the setting in which Growing Well delivers support activities. The Biophilia effect (Wilson E. O. 1984) of engaging with and interacting with nature, was again highlighted as a key to recovery.
and also in promoting the retention of volunteers, with one volunteer making the salient point that they would be unlikely to remain on a support programme where they were working on a production line, but would come and work in the environment of Growing well every day.

What has changed: Essentially Growing Well continues to utilise the natural environment of its location in the same manner as it did throughout delivery in Year 1, and to good effect, supporting volunteers to feel relaxed and engage with nature. In Year 2 a number of improvements were made to the site, including improved vehicular access and improved signage. The organisation has plans to expand the resources at the site, and potential exists to maximise the impact of the natural environment further to increase therapeutic impacts for volunteers (this issue is discussed in more detail within the Recommendations section).

Diversity of Activities – Having a diversity of working activities was again cited by volunteers as an important factor in supporting their mental health recovery, with volunteers identifying that performing different tasks in various settings around the site helped to retain their interest and keep them engaged. One volunteer noted that the variety of tasks at Growing Well was a stark contrast to the monotony of work in their time before attending Growing Well, and was a key factor in their retention.

What has changed: In Year 2 Growing Well introduced new volunteering and training activities including catering. Volunteers are now able to choose to become part of the catering and administration team as opposed to the horticultural team, and prepare meals for following activity days. This has proven popular with volunteers, some of whom are not able to participate in the more physical horticultural activities, and view this as a motivational driver to their recovery. The choice to participate in a range of activities is recognised as beneficial to mental health recovery, as identified by Onken, Dumont, Ridgway, Dornan and Ralph (2002) in citing ‘the freedom of whether and how to participate in programs and services’ as aiding recovery.

During interviews, several volunteers expressed an interest in participating in a wider range of activities, both as day-to-day working tasks and as areas of training. This presents opportunities for Growing Well to increase their impact and options are discussed in the Recommendations section.

Small-scale Delivery - The intimate nature of Growing Well was again cited by volunteers as one of the things that the organisation does best, and is key to delivering personalised support to volunteers. This small group approach was identified as beneficial in increasing ‘…resistance to stigma and rejection of negative in-group stereotype’ Crabtree, Haslam, Postmes, and Haslam (2010) by enabling volunteers to share experiences, ultimately increasing self-esteem. Corrigan and
Watson (2002) argue that in maintaining small group delivery, staff are able to encourage volunteers to identify with their peers, thereby alleviating volunteers’ perceptions of the legitimacy of self-stigmatisation.

A consistent theme that emerged through interviews with volunteers was that there was always a number of staff on hand to support them at any time. This level of support, provided at all times to volunteers during activity days, requires the maintenance of a high staff to volunteer ratio. Management and staff at Growing Well clearly take this area of delivery seriously and activities and staffing rotas are well-planned to ensure an appropriate staff compliment is available to provide practical support to volunteers at all times.

What has changed: Although the number of beneficiaries supported within the year increased by 30%, Growing Well was able to ensure that volunteer group numbers remained appropriate and manageable, with a rough average of 10-12 volunteers attending on any activity day, through the addition of activity days taking place on Mondays. The year also saw an increase in the staffing compliment, with the addition of two new staff members to provide additional frontline support for volunteers.

Commitment and Approach of Staff – Feedback from volunteers through the interview process consistently praised both the commitment and approach of staff. Volunteers appreciated the level of support shown by staff, particularly identifying the attention paid by staff to listen to volunteers and take an interest in their lives, to engage them in conversation about their interests and their lives, and their attempts to find solutions to volunteers’ issues outside of Growing Well. Volunteer feedback identified that staff ‘go out of their way’ to support volunteers, regularly exceeding expectations of volunteers. This level of commitment was observed by the External Evaluator on several occasions during observations, experiential participation and ‘down time’ participation with staff and volunteers and staff at Growing Well should be commended for their commitment to volunteers and to the organisation.

What has changed: It is difficult to identify whether there have been any changes to the commitment and attitude of staff, as levels of both were clearly high in Year 1 and remain high in Year 2. One material change that may be identified, and may be perceived by volunteers as being additional commitment from staff, is the increase in the size of the staff team. This enabled staff to dedicate more time to deliver one-to-one support with volunteers.

Keeping in Touch & Simply Being There – This factor was identified in the Year 1 evaluation as important primarily to ex-volunteers who felt that they had a support at Growing Well to fall back on, should they ever need it.
The Year 2 evaluation does not contain an assessment of sustained impact therefore no consultation with ex-volunteers was conducted as part of this evaluation.

**Additional Factors in Year 2**

The second year of project delivery saw a number of developments to both the delivery and the infrastructure at Growing Well including:

**The employment of two new frontline staff members** – Growing Well secured additional funding to employ an Occupational Therapist to provide additional support to volunteers through a range of interventions including initial needs assessments which were then followed up by individualised interventions, such as graded and adapted support, to enable volunteers to engage in meaningful activities whilst on site. A Catering Coordinator was introduced in the year to develop catering activities for volunteers as a new addition to the volunteering offer.

Interviews with volunteers during the evaluation process highlighted the high level of importance given to the work of both new staff members. Volunteers cited the additional support of the Occupational Therapist as being highly significant in addressing issues including anxiety, confidence, and accessibility of services. The additional staff resource resulted in a greater and more flexible level of one-to-one support and appears to have empowered volunteers to identify with greater clarity, some of the issues affecting their mental health, with one volunteer stating that he is able to be more honest about the root of the personal issues affecting their mental health. The development of the catering activities, and the hot meals prepared by volunteers with the support of the Catering Coordinator, have been cited by volunteers as significant developments within the year.

**Introduction of new volunteering opportunities** - New volunteering opportunities in catering were introduced in Year 2. As cited earlier in this discussion section, the offer of additional opportunities was welcomed by volunteers. The addition of opportunities in new subject areas appears to be important in ensuring that there is a diversity of activities for volunteers, again, a factor that has previously been identified as being key to both recovery and retention of volunteers.

Feedback from volunteers during interviews identified that a more diverse range of training and volunteering opportunities would be welcomed, and that subject areas relating to farm management and the environment were the preferred choice (this is discussed in greater detail in the Recommendations section of this report).

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Growing Well – Mental Health Recovery through Farming: An Evaluation of Performance and Impact

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**Introduction of volunteer activities on Mondays** – In Year 2, Growing Well introduced regular volunteer activity days on Mondays to add to their existing delivery days.

The expansion of delivery to include Mondays was cited by several volunteers as being important, with volunteers noting that being able to attend on an additional or alternative day of the week enabled them to pursue other activities outside of Growing Well, which were aiding their recovery. One volunteer stated that by attending Growing Well on a Monday, he was now able to attend social activities that he had previously missed out on due to a clash with Growing Well delivery. As noted by Tew, Ramon, Slade, Bird, Melton, Le Boutillier (2012), social interactions play a significant role in enabling recovery.

**Introduction of increased employment support** – the additional staff resource at Growing Well enabled a more intensive support programme to be delivered for volunteers. One-to-one support was provided for volunteers encompassing mental health recovery topics such as the history of mental health, how to talk about mental health in the wider community and in the workplace, how to maintain an occupationally balanced week when returning to work and how that impacts on individuals’ mental wellbeing and sustainability in the workplace.

The success of the support, demonstrated by three previous volunteers securing employment within the industry area of their studies, is testament to the delivery and the appropriateness of the support. This is a significant element in both the delivery of the project and perhaps in the development of Growing Well as an organisation. Although Growing Well has always supported the employment goals of volunteers, the additional staff resource has enabled the organisation to provide a greater level of employment support, which has delivered positive outcomes for volunteers.

**Implementation of Social Impact Monitoring** – Growing Well staff worked with a regeneration consultant in the year to assess their existing social impact monitoring methodologies and develop bespoke systems. At the time of this evaluation, the systems had not been in place for a full year, however, the organisation has been able to deliver an impressive Annual Report incorporating social impact data. The implementation of effective social impact management is a significant step for Growing Well and it will deliver robust data to enable the organisation to assess its performance and plan for improved delivery of increased social impacts. The system will also enable Growing Well to gather robust data that may be communicated to potential commissioners and funders thereby increasing the organisation’s competitiveness.
10. Recommendations

A range of Recommendations were put forward as part of the Year 1 evaluation. This section outlines each recommendation and considers whether they were implemented in Year 2, and any impacts achieved:

10.1 Delivery:

A broader range of winter and adverse weather activities should be explored to provide engaging and interesting activities for volunteers during poor weather conditions. Growing Well is soon to appoint a Catering Co-ordinator with a remit of expanding the catering activities and training at the site. This enhancement of activities could potentially be augmented with a programme of additional activities, however, caution should be exercised in ensuring that activities remain relevant to the horticultural and natural environment focus of Growing Well. Growing Well prioritises enterprise/vocationally focussed activities, however, there is potential to add value during winter months with activities such as willow weaving, bird and bat box making, charcoal making, as examples.

What changed in Year 2: The organisation implemented a range of new activities in the year, including indoor activities. The addition of volunteering opportunities in catering has been cited by volunteers and staff as having delivered a range of positive impacts (as discussed in Section 9). Alongside this, the organisation promotes increased social interaction amongst volunteers to compliment more formal support measures. Increased social interaction and feelings of connectedness have been cited as influential in enabling recovery’ (Tew, Ramon, Slade, Bird, Melton, Le Boutillier 2012).

10.2 Systems and Processes:

Review the level of referrals from GP surgeries in light of the delivery of the Annual Participant Survey. Growing Well should assess whether the engagement tactic worked to increase GP referral numbers? If not, why not? Should the tactic be re-employed and if so, what can be improved?

What changed in Year 2: An increased staff compliment in the year enabled a greater focus to be placed on GP referrals. The organisation also hosted four GP CPD training sessions on site, to raise awareness of the services and activities available.

Include a question in the volunteer exit process to ensure that information is gathered relating to the Outcome Indicator 1.1. ‘Number of people reporting reduced
usage of NHS mental health services through the Client Services Receipt Inventory Questionnaire’.

Exit interviews are currently only delivered where appropriate notice of leaving is given by volunteers exiting the project. Some volunteers leave the project without giving sufficient notice to arrange and deliver exit interviews; data relating to these ex-volunteers is not collected and this has the potential to result in data being missed. Exit interviews could be completed over the telephone where volunteers leave the project without giving sufficient notice to enable a face to face exit interview to be arranged. Alternatively, electronic surveys could be emailed to ex-volunteers to gather certain information; this could also be conducted via text surveys.

Staff at Growing Well attempted to contact, by email, all volunteers who had left within the year without conducting an exit interview, however the response rate to this exercise was poor. Staff reported that it was not possible to attempt to contact the volunteers via telephone due to resource limitations.

Moving forward, the staff team aims to incorporate a question within the Recovery Star methodology to ascertain whether volunteer use of NHS services has remained the same, increased or decreased. The question will be asked at each Recovery Star session with volunteers, commencing on the second session and continuing in all subsequent sessions. Results will be recorded on a spreadsheet, along with volunteer start dates, to ensure that data against this outcome is recorded effectively.

Growing Well should explore the benefits of conducting Client Services Receipt Inventory Questionnaires with volunteers who are accessing primary NHS services; this may deliver more accurate data and results relating to Output Indicator 1.1.

Growing Well conducted a review of their monitoring systems in the year and will replace the CSRI questionnaires with Recovery Star methodology in Year 3

Growing Well does not currently have a comprehensive social impact measurement system in place. The public sector commissioning process, in which Growing Well wishes to engage to win public contracts, requires organisations to be able to evidence their social value. Growing Well should strive to embed a social impact measurement system into its project monitoring systems.
As outlined in Section 9, Growing Well worked with consultants to develop and embed social impact monitoring systems and has successfully produced an impressive Annual Report incorporating social impact data.

**Staff at Growing Well collect a considerable range of performance information through a variety of different systems including CORS, GAD7/PHQ9, CSRI, Monthly Supervisions and Volunteer Questionnaires. The data resulting from monitoring activities are held on a central computer. An aspirational goal for Growing Well may include the integration and rationalisation of disparate recording systems to enable Growing Well to interrogate databases to retrieve information and meaningful reports more effectively.**

The monitoring systems at Growing Well were reviewed and will be improved in Year 3 with the introduction of Recovery Star methodology and social impact monitoring systems.
Year 2 Recommendations:

Analysis of delivery and results in Year 2 resulted in the formulation of the following recommendations:

**Adopt a formal co-production model** – Staff at Growing Well take great care to ensure that volunteers feel capable of expressing themselves, communicating their opinions and discussing any issues arising, both in their personal lives and their work with Growing Well. Volunteers are encouraged to take turns in chairing meetings and to participate fully in all meetings, offering their opinions freely.

During observations of team meetings, the External Evaluator observed a number of occasions where volunteers put forward suggestions, which were listened to by staff who appreciated volunteer input. Volunteers are able to make suggestions via Suggestion Form Templates which are collected and discussed at weekly team meetings, with tasks allocated to individual staff members where appropriate. On interviewing management and staff, there appears to be room for improvement in the process for volunteer suggestions to be carried forward to influence delivery and affect the future direction of service delivery.

It is recommended that Growing Well adopts a formal co-production process to ensure that volunteer input is formally recognised and given due consideration in the planning process.

**Rationalise the scheduling of data collection** – It is recommended that data collection be scheduled to fit as closely as practical with major reporting schedules e.g. data collection to coincide with the end of year date for Reaching Communities year ends. This would improve the data collection process, may avoid duplication of volunteers reported in previous years, and would improve the quality of output reporting to funders.

The recommendation includes the scheduling of both Recovery Star and volunteer questionnaire assessments to provide data as close to the end of Year 3 of the Reaching Communities project as possible.

**Enhance the training and volunteering offer** - Expand training and volunteering to include new options that capitalise on Growing Well’s horticultural expertise and maximise the impact of the location and environment, to deliver an improved experience for volunteers. Appropriate ‘land based industries’ training and volunteering options to be considered may include Conservation Skills, Wildlife Identification, Wildlife Management, Dry Stone Walling, Beekeeping, Wild Food Forgaging (linked to catering opportunities), Bushcraft, Chainsaw Proficiency. These
subject areas would compliment Growing well’s existing activities and add linked activities to the horticultural activities currently delivered.

Expanding the training and volunteering offer may also present opportunities for Growing Well to increase both the number of volunteers supported and the income generated through adult education contracts. The delivery of ‘additional’ training and volunteering delivered in ‘additional’ areas of the site, delivered by ‘additional’ staff may also bring new areas of the site into use e.g. dry stone walls, woodlands, whilst also retaining the small group dynamics that have been identified as key to Growing Well’s success.

Approximately 10% of Growing Well’s annual income is derived from the sale of crops grown on site. There would therefore appear to be potential for growing areas of the site to be given over to alternative activities should this be preferable, without placing undue strain on the finances of the organisation.

**Introduce a ‘Topic of the Week’ for down times and meetings** - Staff at Growing Well support volunteers with a range of additional resources such as articles posted on the noticeboards and information leaflets providing advice on how to address issues such as sleeplessness. Interviews with volunteers highlighted the benefits of these additional resources.

Consideration may be given toward the introduction of a topic of the week for meetings, meal times and other down times. The introduction of a topic of the week may help volunteers to focus on particular issues and develop solutions, and could be incorporated into the co-production model if adopted.

**Increase referrals to additional services** - Staff at Growing Well support volunteers through signposting to a range of additional services and support. Interviews with volunteers identified that this support was valued and that referral to additional services e.g. anger management, would be welcomed.

Consideration may be given towards extending the breadth of signposting to include a wider range of additional services within the community.

**Apply to Reaching Communities for the delivery of an Enhanced Three-Year Project** – the Mental Health Recovery through Farming project, although not yet completed, has achieved considerable and impressive results in Years 1 and 2 (as outlined in Year 1 and 2 evaluation reports). Indeed, several of the three-year Reaching Communities targets have been achieved and exceeded by the end of Year 2. The organisation has successfully attracted funding to employ additional staff members, to both expand the breadth of activities and opportunities on offer, and
also expand the availability of one-to-one support. At the time of developing this Evaluation Report, the project was in its third year of delivery, and management were planning for the continuation of services.

During Year 2 delivery, Growing Well, with the input of the enhanced staff compliment, successfully delivered a greater level of personal support linked to achieving the vocational goals of volunteers (employability support). This additional support delivered highly positive results, with several volunteers securing employment in the sectors in which they were trained at Growing Well. Whilst employability support had traditionally been an important element of the programme of support at Growing Well, the success achieved in Year 2 through the additional employability support should be recognised as a positive evolution of the project. The project in Year 2 delivered enhanced outputs and impacts in terms of supporting mental health recovery and transition into employment in careers linked directly to the vocational training delivered through the project. An evolved project, delivering enhanced outputs and impacts including employment outputs, may form the basis of a highly competitive and attractive application to Reaching Communities.
11. References


