



# The Green Hub Project for Teens

## Adult Volunteer Evaluation Findings

January 2024

### Introduction

The Green Hub Project (GHP) could not have grown or had the successes in the extensive ways we have without the wonderful support of all our Adult Volunteers (AVs). Indeed, all strands of our work including the all-important behind the scenes administration and business development, is undertaken totally by volunteers – at the time of writing there are no paid staff.

The GHP Board agreed in July 2023 to listen to our AVs and hear about experiences and lessons we can learn from them. Importantly, this exercise was also to show our AVs that they are valued and bring much experience, skills and knowledge to us. Board members undertook to offer a confidential interview to all who are currently working with us with the exception of the Board members themselves.

***We would like to thank all our Adult Volunteers who took the time to share their views with warmth and honesty; and our Board members who spent time listening and recording their interviews.***

This report seeks to present the findings from those interviews and actions that have since been taken in response to some of the feedback.

### Methodology

A short questionnaire (See Appendix A) was drawn up as a guideline for Board members to use along with an online feedback form for them to complete after each interview.

The objectives were to:

- Hear how they feel they are getting on with us and identify personal benefits to them of volunteering.
- Hear any concerns they may have
- Hear if they feel they have any other training needs
- Hear if they feel they are not being fully utilised
- Begin to evaluate personal benefits to them of volunteering – as part of our GHP evaluation and to assist with further fundraising.

As per decision at the previous Board meeting we (the Board Members) have gone ahead and offered an interview to 48 Volunteers (excluding Board members) from September – October 2023.



### 35 interviews were undertaken listening to:

- 9 Garden Leaders (GL)
- 13 Garden Assistants (GA)
- 3 Garden Maintenance Assistants(GMA)
- 6 Admin Support Team members(AST)
- 1 events volunteer (EV)
- 3 Speakers for the Parent Hub. (SPH)

13 AVs either felt they were 'too new' to be able to give feedback or else they did not respond to the request.

## Findings

Themes emerged from the interviews, summarised and are presented in this report. Quotes, either from the AVs or the interviewer are included to illustrate points.

### 1 Volunteering with the GHP.

The vast majority of AVs reported many positive experiences and personal benefits from volunteering, across all roles, to their own mental wellbeing and sense of purpose.

**1.1 Personal benefits for Adult Volunteers** The opportunity to volunteer with the GHP has given many of our AVs personal benefits, and for some a 'new pathway' after significant life events: such as retirement, loss of a partner, their own mental health challenges, children growing up and needing a new activity, an opportunity to bring their own skill set to a new project.

*'I decided that I needed to find a project where I could be of use, and hopefully impart some of my horticultural knowledge. I have grown vegetables since I was able to stand up. It has given me a purpose, beyond looking after grandchildren. When I got the e-mail about finding someone with green knowledge I felt this could be the thing. I suddenly felt 'needed' again. It was really nice to meet and work with James.'* (GM)

*'It came at the right time - needed to find something a bit different and meaningful. Liked the concept and could see how it worked - small & local.'* (AST)

*'A sense of achievement and feel good feeling.'... 'It is excellent, beyond my expectation. Very satisfying personally. Wanted to give something back because her teen comes to GH.'... 'Volunteering with GHP has helped my sense of purpose working with teens with emotional issues.'* (GLs & GAs)

*'I sometimes wonder if the benefit is for the teens or for me. I love it. It makes me feel valued. It is truly a delight. I love seeing the young people benefit from the garden work and getting happy.'* (GA)

*'It has been wonderful to be part of something filled with joy.'* (SPH)

*'Helps with various points in your life' XXX realised how blessed she is as*





*have had the time to spend with and support her own teens.'* (GA, Interviewer)

*'Feel good helping bring something back to the world. It's been really helpful her to realise that her own Teens are doing really well.'* (GA, Interviewer)

*'Enjoy making a positive contribution and find the gardening useful therapy for myself. Positive feedback from teens and parents is a huge bonus.'* (GL)

*'Feels she is doing something good for herself especially if at the same time it does some good for the teens.'* (GL)

*'Generally a positive experience. I have enjoyed working with the limited number of volunteers that I have met and being involved with, however minimally, in a project with real potential in the new district to which we have recently moved.'* (GM)

*'This is not what XXX often finds in other walks of life, so she values it very much.'* (Interviewer)

**1.2 Working with others** Many of our AVs, in particular those who worked with others in the gardens, found benefit meeting and working alongside others:

*'Feels benefit from working with good friendly volunteers and being in a garden environment'* (GA, Interviewer)

*'Finds the camaraderie at GH very valuable, lots of very likeminded and positive people with varied backgrounds.'* (Interviewer) *'Lovely people'.* (GA)

*'I enjoy the sense of community & how it helps everyone. I feel my confidence has grown - doing public events, putting yourself out there, anyone could ask me anything – I was very shy before.'* (GA)

*'I've found the GHP AVs working at Hydons to be extraordinary, kind and sensitive caring people. ...'It's been a real pleasure and journey to go on with them and having the teens on site.'* (GA, Hydons)

*'Gratitude & thanking the GH. Walked into the GH Open day & it was amazing to meet more of the people behind this, a 2nd garden is great and beginning to ripple through the community. It's very affirming.'* (SPH)

*'I understand that the parent support groups are much appreciated and very helpful – a really very good development.'* (GM)

**2 Organisational people and systems such as communications, on-boarding, team management**

**2.1 Overall organisation** The majority of AVs expressed admiration for the **quality of the GHP as an organisation.**

*'Great organisation, well lead, superbly organised.'* (GL)





*'Value the GHP – the best organisation I have volunteered with.'* (GL)

*'Great job of building that culture.'*(SPH)

*'Vanessa was a very efficient driven person who is a major asset to the charity.'* (GL)

*'People remain heavily invested in the project – all credit to the founders. Green Hub presents itself effectively at public events and increasingly in the locality.'* (GM)

*'Enthusiasm, great bunch of volunteers compared to other voluntary organisations that I have been involved with. Great job of building that culture.'* (SPH)

*'After a few weeks the magic starts to shine. The GHP AVs have brought so much to the place.'* (GA)

**Strategic context** A couple of AVs (who have had significant work experience at senior levels) noted that that a more visible and strategic context for the GHP purpose and organisation would be helpful as the work develops, and offered to help with this thinking.

*'My chief concern, above my pay scale I'm realise, is the apparent lack of context for the work being done. How does it relate to the schools the teens attend – do we know that any positive difference following their time at GH is apparent to them daily, apart from their anxious parents? That must be the ultimate aim of the project after all. There are large numbers of volunteers all full of goodwill and volunteering their time and energy to the project.'* (GM)

*'XXX would like to input ideas (e.g. if we were to discuss expansion, long term strategy) as she feels she has something to contribute to the Board in that regard.'* (GM, Interviewer)

#### **ACTION TAKEN**

- ✓ We already share the Chair reports – these are now all available to Adult Volunteers on our website.
- ✓ In all upcoming quarterly volunteer training sessions, one our two Chair's will do a strategic update for attendees.
- ✓ See evaluation below regarding expanding our evaluation to include longer term outcomes, and greater focus on feedback for funders.

In addition, as the Charity expands there were a few comments about the demand on the workload, particularly on the reliance on key people, and the need to perhaps train others to share more of the organisational workload.

*'Fine at the moment. Challenge could be when Charity expands. One person knows everything (V), so feels that we are vulnerable to be so dependent on her, need two in a box approach. Suggests one to one, do tasks together to transfer.'* (AST, Interviewer)

#### **ACTION TAKEN**

- ✓ We are in the process, in the first place, of recruiting to a part-time Parent and Teen Coordinator. Next step is to explore funding and recruit to a part-time Executive Assistant to our Co-Founder – Vanessa.





**Evaluation** There was an AV who felt that the evaluation presented to date appeared to be subjective.

*'Evaluation of outcomes appears to be based solely on subjective elements.'* (GM)

*'How does it relate to the schools the teens attend – do we know that any positive difference following their time at GH is apparent to them daily, apart from their anxious parents?'*

(repeated quote but relating also to Evaluation, GM)

It was noted that tracking Teens and parents for longer term outcomes arising from input from the GHP was labour intensive (e.g. following up referrals after attendance) and required cooperation of all parties. It was suggested that this might need to be funded work to ensure consistency and sustainability but would be worthwhile as it would help build the evidence base of impact and outcomes.

#### **ACTION TAKEN**

- ✓ We are currently reviewing the evaluation processes we use, with both Teens, Parents and referrers for the Teen Garden sessions and the Parent Hub. This includes a greater focus on feedback to our funders.
- ✓ We are dependent on feedback from participating Teens, Parents and Referrers. This has not been particularly forthcoming and we are reviewing how to increase feedback including making this a condition of participation.
- ✓ Once we have our part-time staff in place we can do more to consolidate our evaluation – particularly on longer term outcomes.

**2.2 Communications** AVs had a lot to say about the importance of timely, appropriate and clear information sharing and feedback. On the whole AVs across all roles found the respective mechanisms such as WhatsApp groups, emails and verbal communication to be helpful and 'manageable'.

*'The communication has been brilliant and Vanessa has been really patient with me. It has been just right. I feel that I am able to keep in the loop, and it doesn't take long to read an e-mail.'* (GA)

*'The use of Whatsapp very effective in particular the communications informing volunteers of the tasks to be undertaken on a Saturday.'* (GL)

*'The emails work well. The Whatsapp group can be a bit hectic, but it works.'* (GA)

*'Appreciates the Communications e.g. WA being broken up into groups that relate to key roles or events.'* (Interviewer)

*'Whatsapp groups has helped in keeping up to date with GH activity which was earlier a problem at times. Communication between garden support and teen sessions has improved – now only occasionally problematic.'* (GM)

**What could we do better?** Although it was recognised that communication is really important it was felt, by a minority, that important messages can get lost in the volume received at busy





periods, and in some cases, they received messages they felt weren't necessary for their role. Some did acknowledge that this issue is difficult to address although any reduction in low value messages would be beneficial. Some of those also self-identified as not being very up to date with technological ways of communication.

*'Overload of Whatsapp. Prefer one email, keep it simple. Some can get lost, can miss things.'*  
(GA)

*'Volunteering should be able to fit into your life & some people may feel pressured by the number of Whatsapp groups and frequent messaging. Have to set your own boundaries so I'll only respond when it feels right/necessary.'* (AST)

*'Struggles a bit given that so much contact is via Whatsapp - she would like more face to face contact with people. She has even thought about whether she wants to continue and she finds this aspect frustrating.'* (Interviewer)

*'It is difficult to engage!  
I get too much WhatsApp traffic most of which is not relevant to me.'* (SPH)

*'I am hopeless on tech, so what's app and e-mails don't work for me. As long as I can still be involved and use text with James I am happy. I like our informal Wednesday meetings in the garden.'* (GM)

## ACTION TAKEN

- ✓ WhatsApp groups are used NOT to engage with people on subjects that don't relate to them

The more subject specific, the narrower the group and more relevant the content. Hence, they can be very useful. We recommend WA group organisers to encourage users to only post relevant and timely information and to moderate accordingly.

**Other communication** A couple of AVs felt they would value more feedback on the impacts / outcomes for the Teens attending, and on upcoming plans for the GHP.

*'Would like feedback monthly on the outcomes of where referrals actually do come from.'* (AST)

*'Can we have a quarterly update issued of what is planned? Bear in mind that not everyone is following the GH social media. Newsletter?'* (GA)

*'I talked to Vanessa on one occasion as I felt that the ratio of young people to adults were not enough, but she was great, and it feels much better since.'* (GA)

**Volunteer section of the Green Hub website** A couple of AVs expressed that it was difficult to navigate the volunteer section of the GHP website to easily find relevant information. It was felt that there would be benefit in undertaking a redesign. This is now underway.





*'Volunteer section of the Green Hub website xxx expressed that it was difficult to navigate to easily find relevant information.'* (GL, Interviewer)

**Knowing who does what in the organisation** A number of AVs noted that they were unclear about the roles and responsibilities across the wider organisation. This was of some concern to them, especially when there is some turnover of people, knowing who to talk or refer to on some issues. It was suggested that it may be an idea to detail people's roles and responsibilities [in brief] on the volunteers area of the GHP website i.e. Names of the Management Team, Garden Management Team, Senior Teen Leads, Volunteers.

*'Given that there are so many volunteers, she doesn't know most. Could we have a who's who in the volunteers area of the website?' (SPH, Interviewer)*

*'A 'Rogue's gallery' of Who's Who in the organisation as some not sure who to liaise with over certain issues.'* (GL)

## ACTION TAKEN

The Volunteer section of the website has now has a full reworking and includes:

- ✓ Who's who of the full Green Hub team (except those who haven't provided their info after 3 reminders)
- ✓ Plan to update website structure in 1<sup>st</sup> Q 2024, to include more info for potential volunteers
- ✓ Key communication processes.

**2.3 On boarding** Most AVs found this to be efficient and helpful.

*'XXX appreciated the informal interview and on boarding process which was very good.'* (GA)

*'XXX has found Green Hub a good experience. She believes the induction was good in particular meeting Jane at her house for a more personal interaction.'* (Interviewer)

## What could we do better?

There were a small number of AVs who had initially found the 'on boarding system' confusing and in some cases not to be complete. This made them feel less valued and potentially off putting. However, most of those issues were dealt with quickly once they came to Vanesa's attention.

*'Xxxx was frustrated by the on boarding process and felt she was asked the same questions several times. She felt that, had she not known Tone, she might not have continued.'*  
(Interviewer)

There were technical issues for a small minority although, as said before, once drawn to the attention of Vanessa were addressed *'initial engagement was hampered by technical issues however this was quickly addressed with the help of Vanessa.'* (Interviewer)

XXX expressed that each new volunteer takes a fair amount of time and money to on board. It may well be a valued exercise to identify the level of commitment new volunteers can make prior to undertaking the full on boarding process. (AST)





In addition, there was a comment made concerning that recruiting quality volunteers needed to continue as the Charity workload expands.

*'In the excitement of growing the project fast volunteers have sometimes been taken on with little attention to their skills or expectations. I have found myself needing to provide moral support to prevent several potential meltdowns.'* (GM)

**2.4 Planning ahead** There were a few comments noting that there had been occasions when AVs had been given short notice or needed longer to plan talks or supporting events.

*'Scheduling talks has been a juggling act and having a busy business it is frustrating. One example, suddenly can we do two talks next months. Dates go to and from and then no takers so cancelled.'* (SPH)

*'XXX would find it helpful to have a calendar of events to help her plan better.'* (EV)

*'Really wants us to sit down, plan ahead put an annual calendar together.'* (Interviewer)

#### **ACTION TAKEN**

- ✓ Structure of Annual plan in the process of being finalised
- ✓ Will be available by end Jan 2024.

**2.5 Garden team management** The GHP sessions for Teens model for teens with a course number of sessions in the garden was seen to be a helpful and appropriate one. Although there had been a change in Garden Leaders over time it was felt that the current arrangement of several Garden Leaders had improved.

*'Garden leaders arrangements have improved - better than they used to be - but still could be better.'* (GA)

**Roles and responsibilities of those involved with garden sessions** There appears to be some tension and differences of views with regards to the roles and purposes of Garden Leaders, Assistants and Maintenance in supporting the Teens. A few thought that the teens were not being asked to do more as they felt they were capable of this:

*'GH needs more clarity over who does what in the gardens and what is the horticultural wisdom versus the teen volunteers who are interested in the welfare side of things - this tension needs to evolve.'* (GM)

*'Goals of each session, what is expected of the teens, what Volunteers should and should not do, such as ask personal questions.'* (GL)

*'A clearer handover and spread of activities across both Saturday sessions.'* (GL)

*'Would like to see the Garden Leaders more joined up and on the same page.'* (GL)

*'I am mainly concerned that we are not getting the teens to do that much work. I would love to see them take on more challenges, and more difficult things. I know they struggle with*







*mental health, but I also think they can be stretched more, like taking the cover off in the green house.'* (GM)

*'The gardeners and the teen people have some tension between them - some of these people on both sides are very forthright.'* (GA)

However, others pointed out that the role of the AVs was to be present and support the teens and there was maybe a training need:

*'We are there for them and not to tell them what to do all the time - this depends very much on the garden leader - more training?'* (GA)

*'One example of the garden leader being inappropriate to deal with the teens at the garden session - too dictatorial and aggressive and wonders if the safeguarding training is strong enough.'* (GA)

*'Is concerned that some garden volunteers take on a more 'teacher-like' approach - with lots of chatter. XXX feels that chatter should come from the teens - that they should have the chance to enjoy the garden in mindful peace.* But XXX accepts doesn't know if this is valid - we discussed whether this would be a great conversation for a training session. (Interviewer feedback)

A small number felt a bit frustrated when there were not many teens attending or they had run out of activities to do with them.

*'Frustrated when not enough teens and you just feel like you're there to do the gardening.'* (GA)

#### **ACTION TAKEN**

✓ We have worked hard to improve the communication between the midweek team and teen-facing volunteers – is now working more effectively.

**A suggestion box for teens and also Parents** Involving Teens and Parents more in sharing ideas for the garden was mentioned by a couple of AVs.

#### **ACTION TAKEN**

✓ Suggestion box for ideas from Teens or Parents will be available in the gardens by end Jan 2024.

**Annual Garden cycle/calendar** It was suggested that it would be helpful for all concerned with the garden work if there could be a visible 'poster' of the annual garden cycle/calendar e.g. when to buy and plant bulbs or when to sow what seeds on display in both garden shelters. There had been talk of this but it has not happened.

## **2.6 Provision of equipment and other resources**

Garden Assistants appreciated that all the equipment that AVs & teens need in the garden is there & well maintained. However, there was a comment from one of the Garden Assistants





would like to see more order in the garden sheds with things having a designated and clearly labelled place so that you know where to find things.

**2.7 Expanding the Art and Craft activities** There were a few references to expanding the Art and Craft activities. This could be beneficial in balancing the sessions, particularly in winter, and as the number of sessions develop with potential of the limitations of garden activities, and noting the enjoyments that some teens have from these activities.

*'On reflection I feel we could do more art, and crafts. The teen likes that. Teens love craft workshops.'* (GA)

*'There should be a balance between garden activity and craft activity.'* (GL)

#### **ACTION TAKEN**

✓ Art and Craft training will be expanded in 2024.

### **3 Training**

In general Adult Volunteers have valued the training they had as part of the GHP Induction process such as First Aid had valued the opportunity for this.

**Mental Health** The majority of AVs recognised that they weren't expected to be experts in this field. Nevertheless there was a sense and, for some an interest, in further training in this issues

*'Anything that I could learn that would help the teens will be really appreciated.'* (GL)

*'As the GHP expands might need to think about Mental Health skills base.'* (GA)

*'I feel she is slightly anxious about a potential situation where a Teen might need 'specialist' MH support.'* (Interviewer)

Specific training on mental health issues particularly on those experienced by the teens such as more of an understanding of the complexity and range of neuro-diverse and other mental health challenges and how best to support them was a common theme across most roles. This was mainly to help them understand more about how best to communicate and 'be with' the teens' – e.g. knowing when best to leave them and not instigate conversation.

*'Finds it difficult to know about and engage with the range of neuro-diversity that some of the teens have. Maybe more training?'* (AST)

*'Some of the AVs are not that good at prompting conversations with the Teens when they are taking a break. Suggests we could use some 'Coaching' type cards which ask questions that then spark conversations- she has some in mind that she's used with her own family.'* (SPH)

**Listening skills** were mentioned – in particular by some of our trained 'mental health' professionals as being needed by some of the Adult Volunteers working with Teens.

*'I would love to do the active listening course, it would help me with feeling more confident with the teens.'* (GA)





**Working with anxious parents** A couple of AVs suggested some training about working with anxious parents.

*'Would like to learn more about how to 'manage demanding / critical / pushy parents. Need to re-inforce there is only so far we can go and are also not trained mental health professionals.'* (AST)

**Transgender and use of pronouns** Two AVs mentioned that Transgender and use of pronouns training would be welcomed.

**Team working** A small number of Adult Volunteers reflected that they thought a number of Garden Assistants and Leaders might benefit from some training on working with other AVs & Teens, as well as more closely defining their roles.

#### **ACTION TAKEN**

- ✓ Major restructuring of volunteer training with distinct pathways for 4 categories of volunteers
  - Garden / teen facing
  - Garden / non teen facing
  - Parent Hub, Teen Talks and Support team / teen facing
  - Support team / non teen facing.
- ✓ Planning for a phased launch starting end of February, 2024
  - Will include mandatory training for all new Adult Volunteers including LGBTQ and Autism, and a commissioned bespoke Mental Health First Aid Course for working with teens
  - An on-going quarterly 'volunteer continuing development' programme that aims to include topics such as Low Mood, Anxiety, Neurodiversity.

## **4 Offers of skills**

AVs were asked if they had any additional skills they felt they could offer to support the development of the GHP.

**Cyber security** is her professional skill and she would love to impart some basic knowledge to teens and parents - she would like to run a course for these groups. *(Interviewer)*

**Strategic development** XXX would like to input ideas (e.g. if we were to discuss expansion, long term strategy) as she feels she has something to contribute to the Board in that regard.

XXX is keen to help us with expanding our **Arts and Crafts activities**, but didn't think we needed her.

## **5 Conclusion and actions taken**

Organising, interviewing and analysing feedback from our Adult Volunteers has been a considerable exercise that has generated valuable feedback and learnings. This is timely as the GHP has recently become a Charity and is expanding its offers in a context of increasing need for emotional and social support for Teens and their families. One of our AVs commented





*'This is a very good exercise - would be good to have some feedback.'*

Considering that the GHP is a relatively young project the feedback from our valued AVs suggests that they see many benefits both for themselves as well as for the Teens and families.

There are clearly significant personal benefits to mental wellbeing and sense of purpose for many of our AVs. These include 'new pathways' following changed circumstances e.g. retirement, a sense of purpose, making a positive contribution to a cause they believe in and working with likeminded people.

We have taken the feedback on board, including where suggestions for improvement have been made. These actions are presented below under respective headings and no doubt more will follow.

**Anthea Cooke**  
**Trustee and lead for Evaluation**  
**January, 2024**

## Appendix A





## The Green Hub Project for Teens

### Adult Volunteers Follow up Questionnaire, 2023

#### Exercise purpose

It is important that we have a more formal follow up of our Adult Volunteers (AVs) to:

- Hear how they feel they are getting on with us and identify personal benefits to them of volunteering. This is part of our GHP evaluation and to assist with further fundraising.
- Hear what they think about the Green Hub Project as an organisation including the systems to support and communicate with Adult Volunteers
- Hear any concerns they may have either about volunteering or about the Green Hub Project
- Hear if they feel they have any other training needs
- Hear if they feel they are not being fully utilized
- Listen to any suggestions they have on improving the Green Hub Project and their Volunteering experience.

Hence, Board members are being asked to organise and meet with approximately 6 Adult Volunteers each and to have an informal conversation with them (approx. ½ hour with each?).

There is a form for recording/inputting your conversation on AllClients – <https://bit.ly/3EBeyQg>

#### Areas to explore

... after an introduction of why we are doing this:

- How has your experience of volunteering with us been, any personal benefits that you have found? *e.g. feeling doing something worthwhile, meeting new & likeminded people, contribution to the community / environment, helpful for your own mental wellbeing?*
- How have you found working for the Green Hub Project as an organisation? What works well and is there anything we could do better?
- Have there been any concerns you've had since volunteering with us?
- Anything else you feel you would like to do as a volunteer, any other skills you'd like to share or have training on / develop?
- Anything else you'd like to share?

