



MAY 2020

THE SEEDS PROJECT FINAL EVALUATION



photo courtesy of Mila Campoy

COMPILED BY
BLOOMSBURY BEGINNINGS CIC



PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

WHO ATTENDED



photo courtesy of Ferhat Ulusu

The Seeds project, funded by Gilead Sciences HIV Age Positively initiative, used nature as a powerful catalyst for better health management, social connection and reducing the stigma felt by older people living with HIV. It involved therapeutic gardening, garden visits, outdoor yoga, mindfulness, cardio vascular exercise, nutrition and cookery. 58 people participated (41 of whom gave personal data for this evaluation). Nearly 70% of the participants were diagnosed more than 10 years ago and of those 17 have lived with HIV for more than 20 years reflecting the project's focus on helping the growing numbers of people who have HIV as a long term condition. .

73% were above 50, with 14 participants over 60 including most of the very regular attenders. 25% (10) of the group were women and there was an even split in terms of sexuality between heterosexual and gay/msm/lesbian. It is unusual for an HIV service to be able to attract such a mixed group of participants. The group was very ethnically diverse, with over 30% (13) from BAME backgrounds. All but 2 of the participants lived in London. Half the participants identified as unemployed or retired. Of the 40 registered attendees, 17 attended 6 or more sessions, and an additional 8 attended more than 15 of the 56 sessions offered in total..

PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

REASONS FOR ATTENDANCE AT THE SEEDS PROJECT

The challenges that brought participants to the project included struggling with their physical and mental health and the side effects of medication, feeling lonely, losing work or benefits, or retiring. Some had been unable to tell close family and friends about their HIV status

Some were already keen gardeners who didn't have outside space of their own or were struggling with their gardens, others were interested in being out in nature and in the second phase of the programme worries about diet and nutrition prompted some new participants to attend for The Food Chain talks. The majority had been interested in meeting people of a similar age living with HIV. The project also attracted younger hetero sexual men for whom there are few HIV related services.

Many of the participants were strongly influenced to join and stay involved by the welcome that they received from Virginia Cucchi the project co-ordinator, who was able to quickly establish a rapport with a diverse range of participants and had built up credibility with all the referring agencies over a period of years. The project was also unusual in offering the structure of a weekly service, which many participants mentioned as a significant benefit.

The outdoor setting and the Calthorpe's ethos of allowing people to 'be themselves' contributed to regular attendance and word of mouth referrals as the project progressed. The Central YMCA, The Food Chain and a number of clinics supported their existing programme participants to get involved.

"THE NAME ITSELF WAS INVITING
– THE IDEA OF GROWING
SOMETHING NEW"

"I LOVED GARDENING BUT WAS
FEELING DEMORALISED TRYING TO
LOOK AFTER MY OWN ALONE"

"I LIKED THE IDEA THAT IT WAS
SOMETHING PRACTICAL, NO NEED
TO SPEAK"

"I'D BEEN INVOLVED IN AN
ALLOTMENT PROJECT BEFORE
WHICH I'D REALLY ENJOYED"

PROJECT IMPACT

OVERVIEW



Photo Courtesy Ferhat Ullusu.

The project has made a very significant impact on the health and wellbeing of the people directly involved as regular participants and has contributed to the HIV field more widely through its work with the partner agencies, conference presentations including a mobile U=U display at the London Fast Track Cities conference, an article in [The Lancet](#) and a french radio [podcast](#). Regular participants reported improvements in all three of the project outcome targets: improving their clinical health; reducing loneliness, isolation and improving social interactions and reducing feelings of HIV-related stigma. This may also reduce their likelihood of developing co-morbidities that occur with age, for example diabetes, osteoporosis and high blood pressure.

Their feedback strongly validates the project's hypothesis that connecting with nature, through planting, growing, exercise and healthier eating, in the company of other people living with HIV, can have a transformative effect.

The project reached 58 participants, narrowly missing the target of 60 and peer mentor training was not implemented (although 8 participants were already trained as peer mentors). However, there were many additional activities delivered than originally intended and a much more ambitious programme of partnership work. The project has now won further funding, and interest from other agencies who would like to replicate its success.

PROJECT IMPACT

OUTCOMES FOR IMPROVING CLINICAL HEALTH - ANXIETY & DEPRESSION



Photo courtesy Antonio Forte

The project aimed to improve clinical health through reducing anxiety and depression, improving physical tonus and better knowledge, skills and ability to sustain healthy living and manage symptoms through diet.

In relation to anxiety and depression, Evidence from focus groups and 1:1 interviews repeatedly demonstrated that regular participants attending any part of the programme felt a positive impact on these feelings and this was corroborated by referring professionals. Many spoke about how being regularly outside in nature, doing something purposeful and relaxing, and in the company of others had lifted worries and given them hope.

"I WAS SUFFERING FROM SERIOUS DEPRESSION AND HAD CONTEMPLATED SUICIDE – SEEDS HELPED ME RECONNECT WITH PEOPLE AND GET BACK TO NORMALITY"

"VIRGINIA AND DAVID (PEER MENTOR) HELPED ME TO GET THE RIGHT SUPPORT AND MEDICATION THROUGH THE HOSPITAL AND I LEARNT MANY THINGS WHICH HAVE MADE ME FEEL MUCH LESS DEPRESSED AND ANXIOUS"

PROJECT IMPACT

OUTCOMES FOR CLINICAL HEALTH - ANXIETY & DEPRESSION

The evaluation questionnaires also showed increased levels of confidence: e.g 85% of green gym' participants (yoga, mindfulness and cardio-vascular), said their confidence had increased as a result of the sessions,

Feedback on mindfulness showed knowledge levels rose for 5 out of 6 participants, and all 6 intended to use the techniques they'd learnt to help themselves and others. It was in these sessions that participants first talked in depth about the impact HIV has on them.

Later in the programme there were 2 specific wellbeing talks by Susan Cole from NAM. These were felt by the project co-ordinator to be particularly well received, and 6 of the 7 participants reported increases in confidence and knowledge around wellbeing

One participant with agoraphobia was sent seeds by the project co-ordinator and kept in touch online, reporting that he felt a part of the project and hoped to attend when his agoraphobia reduced.

"IT TAKES AWAY MY SADNESS
AND HELPS ME BECOME MORE
POSITIVE"

"I'VE DECIDED TO SIGN UP TO
AN 8 WEEK MINDFULNESS
COURSE NOW"

"IT HAS HELPED ME TO LEAVE
THE HOUSE"

PROJECT IMPACT

OUTCOMES FOR CLINICAL HEALTH - PHYSICAL TONUS & VITALITY



photo courtesy of Virginia Cucchi

For improving physical tonus and vitality, participants spoke about how well the yoga and cardio vascular sessions addressed their particular needs because the staff delivering had an expertise in HIV (and in 1 case was living with HIV themselves) ensuring that they were sensitive to specific challenges participants faced e.g. the balance exercises in yoga help to prevent falls and muscle strains common in older people and exercise contributed to pain management for some suffering chronic pain.. 10 out of 11 rated their knowledge as improved and intended to use the skills they had learnt at home. Participants felt that regular gardening had improved their physical health as well as helping them to feel more calm. Visits to a variety of gardens and nature reserves gave participants the opportunity to exercise, often in environments they'd not experienced.

"IT REALLY HELPED ME WITH MY PHYSICAL BALANCE"

"I HAD NEVER PRACTICED YOGA OUTDOORS OR IN AND FOUND THE LESSONS THERAPEUTIC"

"[I WILL] EXERCISE MORE AT HOME NOW I KNOW HOW TO DO IT"

PROJECT IMPACT

OUTCOMES FOR CLINICAL HEALTH - DIET & NUTRITION



photo courtesy of Virginia Cucchi

The project also aimed to improve participants' knowledge, skills and ability to manage health and reduce co-morbidities through diet.

Gardening sessions led by garden therapist Mila Campoy at Calthorpe Community Garden were closely tied to food growing and finished with drinking herbal tea together. Garden visits included places such as Kew Gardens, Chelsea Physic Gardens and the Royal School of Physician opened opportunities to talk about medicines, plants and nutrition from many perspectives. In the autumn and winter a series of 9 nutrition sessions were delivered by The Food Chain, including a practical cooking class and a fields trip to a supermarket and Borough Market. A new partnership with Urbanwise provided additional trips towards the end of the project.

"MY DIET HAS CHANGED
DRASTICALLY, I HAVE NEVER
EATEN SO MUCH FRUIT AND
VEG IN MY LIFE"

"GROWING PLANTS HELPED ME
TO THINK ABOUT HOW I
NURTURE MYSELF"

PROJECT IMPACT

OUTCOMES FOR CLINICAL HEALTH - DIET & NUTRITION

Those attending a range of the project sessions gained a strong understanding of how good health can be supported through the process of connecting with the natural world, growing and eating plants. In some cases participants spoke about how they were reminded of, and reconnected to childhood knowledge and experience of growing and eating vegetables.

In relation to the nutrition talks, 17 out of 18 attending reported an increase in knowledge and 13 answered "definitely yes" to whether they intended to adopt the advice in their diet. There was a lot of discussion about HIV medication and diet, which the sessions were also able to address.

The impact of gardening sessions on participants' knowledge of planting and growing food was more variable, partly because more were already experienced gardeners, however there was evidence that, along with the therapeutic and social benefits of the sessions, participants learnt a number of new skills.

'I'M PRE DIABETIC SO THE PRACTICAL SUPPORT AROUND MY DIET IS VERY GOOD"

"I'M GOING TO JOIN THE FOOD CHAIN PROGRAMME TO HELP ME LEARN MORE"

"WE CREATED POTS TO ATTRACT BUGS AWAY FROM PLANTS, DISCUSSED BEE-KEEPING AND HAD HERBAL TEA WITH A CHAT"

"I HAVE LEARNT ABOUT PRUNING"

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PROJECT IMPACT

OUTCOMES FOR CONNECTEDNESS AND REDUCING SOCIAL ISOLATION



photo courtesy of Ferhat Ulusu

The project aimed to reduce loneliness and to build a sense of social belonging, through every aspect of its programme with a total of 56 face to face sessions and an active Whatsapp and email group. It was very apparent from all the feedback that very strong friendship bonds and peer support have come from the project: 97% of those completing session feedback forms agreed that they felt more connected as a result of attending. In the focus group participants talked about the strong sense of community they have formed - partly because of their shared experience as older people with HIV and partly because Virginia and the staff at Calthorpe had created a 'protected', peaceful environment with activities which allowed them to share their own expertise and learn from others.

**"I MADE EXCELLENT
SUPPORTIVE NEW
FRIENDS"**

**"I HADN'T HAD THAT MANY
PEOPLE AT MY HOUSE IN
YEARS"**

PROJECT IMPACT

OUTCOMES FOR CONNECTEDNESS AND REDUCING SOCIAL ISOLATION

These bonds grew over time, so while the early gardening sessions were considered sociable many participants commented that these friendships were accelerated once the outdoor exercise sessions began.

It was some times more challenging to manage relationships at sessions held inside around the table, where different perspectives, vulnerabilities, experiences and communication styles were more apparent. However participants felt that Virginia managed these extremely well, so that attendance, learning and connectedness were not adversely affected by the time the project was completed.

As well as group peer support, there were a number of examples of powerful 1:1 informal mentoring relationships where participants' wellbeing was significantly enhanced: for example through help with a housing problem, to overcome break down with a partner, how to navigate the NHS system in order to get services and being more open about living with HIV.

Confidence gained through the project has also helped some participants to find employment, take up new opportunities to study and to volunteer. For example one member has trained as a volunteer leader at Kew, one trained to be a guide at Leighton House and another has applied for an allotment. In some cases they have joined groups delivered by the referring agencies, although the project co-ordinator would like to have seen this happening with greater frequency.

"I DON'T HAVE A GREAT NUMBER OF FRIENDS WITH HIV, SO THIS GAVE ME MANY NEW ONES WHO'VE HAD IT FOR A LONG TIME"

"THE GROUP FELT INSTANTLY WARM"

"TALKING, DOING GARDENING, HELPS OVERCOME SORROWS OF THE SOUL"

"THIS GIVES ME A FOUNDATION TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON MY CAREER GOALS"

"I ENJOYED BEING ABLE TO SHARE MY KNOWLEDGE OF PLANTING WITH A GROUP MEMBER WHO LIKED COOKING AND WANTED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT HERBS"

PROJECT IMPACT

OUTCOMES FOR REDUCING THE STIGMA OF LIVING WITH HIV



photo courtesy of Ferhat Ulusu

The project aimed to help participants feel less stigmatised and more able to talk about living with HIV. In addition to being able to achieve this for many of the participants individually, the project also succeeded in raising awareness more widely through an exciting, and unanticipated element of the project: the creation of a U=U campaign flower bed at the Calthorpe Garden, and subsequently a mobile version of the display. The flower bed was unveiled at the Chelsea Fringe Festival and the mobile flower display was taken to the HIV London Fast Track City Initiative conference at the Barbican Centre and the Guildhall crypt by Virginia and a project participant. It received a lot of attention at these conferences and was featured on social media, 8 of the project participants themselves were unaware that if the viral load is undetectable it is untransmittable to other people, and described how transformative that knowledge has been.

“THE U=U DISPLAY SHOWED HOW VIRGINIA WAS ABLE TO FACILITATE LEADERSHIP IN THE GROUP TO BRING IMPORTANT MESSAGES TO A WIDER AUDIENCE, AND TO RAISE THE PROFILE OF SEEDS”

PROJECT IMPACT

OUTCOMES FOR REDUCING THE STIGMA OF LIVING WITH HIV

They were also delighted to be able to work on the campaign to spread the word to a wider audience of people visiting Calthorpe

The fact that the project was based at a community garden rather than the more protected environment of a specialist HIV service inevitably held some potential participants back from joining because of concerns about being labelled or discriminated against, but Virginia's own strong personal mission, experience and advocacy were important in breaking down these barriers for many others who did choose to register.

Once they had started participants felt that they were welcome, and not "singled out" at the Calthorpe. They were not worried about sitting as a group in the public cafe run at the Calthorpe. In later sessions, particularly in yoga, mindfulness and the nutrition sessions, people felt comfortable to talk about their experience of HIV with each other.

Some participants told us that being involved led to them deciding to talk more openly with friends and family, or to contribute to events where their HIV status would be apparent.

Virginia's personal willingness to talk about living with HIV was considered inspiring by a number of participants and partner agencies. It has also been critical in helping the project to send a broader message about the importance of continuing to work on reducing stigma, for example, in an article for Lancet magazine about the project and how she developed it.

"GROUPS LIKE THE SEEDS PROJECT PROVIDE A SAFE HAVEN"

"WE NEVER FELT JUDGED AT THE CALTHORPE"

IT'S NICE TO BE ABLE TO TELL MY FAMILY ABOUT HOW I AM ENJOYING THE GARDENING AND CLASSES"



CONCLUSIONS

The Seeds Project has strongly demonstrated its core proposition that therapeutic gardening and outdoor exercise groups for people over 50 living with HIV can help them to overcome loneliness, stigma and improve or maintain their mental wellbeing and physical health. Feedback from participants is particularly convincing in relation to how connected they feel to others, but also in how their physical and mental health improved with classes that were tailored to their specific needs. In some cases, they feel more confident to discuss their HIV status, particularly those involved in the U=U displays at Calthorpe and the London Fast Track City Initiative conference. The project benefits from committed and consistent leadership in Positively UK's Virginia Cucchi, who has a clear vision, based on many years of personal and professional experience. She has worked hard to build trust with people referred to the project, some of whom have not been involved in HIV related services before or spoken to family and friends about living with HIV. Participants also commented on how welcome she makes them feel, and the importance of her personal encouragement and support to keep them attending. The calibre of session tutors (especially those who are also living with HIV) has also been pivotal to the project's success. The outdoor element of the project was what set it apart at the start, and it was able to successfully transition indoors during the winter months. At a strategic level, the project goals aligned strongly with the mission and values of all the delivery partner agencies and of Gilead Science Ltd the funding partners. It has already been able to contribute to local and national policy and practice development, and has the potential to offer further insights and lessons as it delivers a second year of its programme.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- The project was most effective for those who came regularly and engaged with the range of sessions. Future participant recruitment should focus on a more achievable total number of direct participants, (retaining it's diverse base in terms of sexuality, gender and background), along with a target for indirect participants.
- In the short term, to respond to the coronavirus outbreak, and the restrictions on movement for the project participants and co-ordinator, the project may still be able to offer online support for it's regular members, along with an outreach programme to distribute seeds and planting materials
- Continue to ensure the central proposition of working with nature to effect change informs the cycle of activities, building particularly on those elements of the programme which were innovative, achieved high levels of engagement and had greatest impact on participants.
- Consider using social business modelling as a way to help sustain the project's activity in the long term and maximise grant and customer income generating opportunities.
- Ensure the project board meets regularly and has senior representation from each of the partner agencies.
- Use the wellbeing index as the main quantitative method for measuring participant outcomes, and streamline the session feedback forms.
- Create more long term gardening interventions which give opportunities for those with a greater interest or skill in gardening and horticulture to pursue paid work, volunteering or social activities.
- Build on the strong engagement in the introductory yoga and mindfulness sessions with similar nature based exercise this summer and offering more advanced classes to those who are ready.
- Extend the very popular public garden visits programme. Facilitate some of these being led by group members to help sustain and grow the social network



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Identify more possible sites for floral displays displays with positive messages about HIV, in other community gardens
- Develop and deliver a social media strategy to help drive the project's goals in relation to reducing stigma and raising public awareness, as well as potentially recruiting new participants.
- Consider changing the name of any future replication because of the slang connotation of the word Seeds
- Consider how a similar programme might benefit other groups living with long term health conditions
- Help to further develop Virginia as a strategic leader, practitioner and role model by including a CPD element in the project budget

APPENDIX 1

PROJECT GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY

The Seeds Project was funded by Gilead Sciences as part of their HIV Ageing Positively initiative which supports innovative and bold approaches to treatment and care so that all people living with HIV lead even longer, healthier and more fulfilled lives. It is based on four focus areas or 'pillars': community action (ensuring the voices of people living with HIV are heard in decision making at a national or local level); personal health (empowering individuals to manage their overall health and wellbeing); equality (improving equality and equity, and reducing stigma) and health services (addressing inefficiencies, promoting the sharing of specialist knowledge, and championing best practice). The Seeds Project was able to contribute to all of these pillars, but was particularly focused on personal health management.

The project was led by Positively UK, in partnership with Calthorpe Community Garden, Central YMCA and The Food Chain. NAM and Urbanwise became delivery partners later in the programme. It's focus on peer support and connectedness reflected Positively UK's vision that: "Everyone living with HIV has access to effective peer support to increase their knowledge, confidence and connections, to improve their health and quality of life. We want all people living with HIV to have access to peer-led support by 2020".

The project strongly aligned to the values and missions of it's partner organisations: for Calthorpe Community Garden this is about the impact of therapeutic horticulture and its wider objective "to provide opportunities for people to meet and take care of each other and the environment". For the Central YMCA the project was able to contribute to the fitness and wellbeing objectives of it's HIV Positive Health programme and for The Food Chain the project helped to fulfil their aim to ensure that everyone living with HIV has access to a healthy, balanced diet.

The project was overseen by a management group representing each of the organisations: Sarah Fraser, Service Lead at Positively UK (who also line manages the Project Co-ordinator), Mila Campoy, Older People's Co-ordinator at Calthorpe Community Garden, Becky Gorman, YMCA HIV Health Co-ordinator and Anna Brewster, The Food Chain Volunteers and Service Manager. They offered strategic support and oversight to ensure the project was meeting its targets along with opportunities to spread learning from the project across their organisations and in the wider policy arena.

Project delivery centred on weekly sessions which brought project participants together to enjoy and connect with nature, with the winter sessions being held indoors and focusing more on healthy cooking and eating. Most activities took place at the Calthorpe Community Garden, near Kings Cross in Central London but there were also off site visits to the City of London, a variety of public gardens, a farm, nature reserve, a food market and supermarket, as well as sessions at the YMCA and The Food Chain.

The programme ran 18 gardening sessions including the creation of U=U static and mobile floral displays, 4 cardio vascular exercise classes, 8 yoga classes, 5 mindfulness sessions, 12 off site garden visits and 9 food, nutrition and wellbeing sessions. Peer mentors attended and offered 1:1 support. Attendance varied from 2-10 participants, with the majority of sessions attracting 6-8 people.

Email and Whatsapp groups run by the co-ordinator and a peer mentor supported day to day communication between participants. The project co-ordinator attended a number of national and international events to promote the project and share its findings with a wider audience.

APPENDIX 2

CASE STUDIES (ANONYMISED)

Paul got involved with Seeds when it started in March 2019. He had been living with HIV for 12 years but had not told his family, friends or colleagues at work. He had a senior management role in the hospitality industry and had been able to manage his symptoms well through medication since being diagnosed in 2007. So after the initial shock and adjustment of the first few months he had to a large extent put it to the back of his mind. But when he retired in late 2018, he found himself missing the busy professional and social life that he had through work, and became much more aware of his health, and of the stress of not feeling able to talk to those nearest to him about his sexuality and having HIV. He only had one friend in London with HIV and when he tried to widen his social circle he found he had little in common with the predominantly young crowd that he met in pubs and clubs. He didn't know his neighbours and although he is close to and visits his family frequently in Europe he did not feel able to share his worries with them.

He realised that he was becoming depressed, and talked about his situation when he went to his clinic for a check up at the start of this year. They mentioned Positively UK. Although he hadn't been in touch with any specialist HIV services until then, he decided to call and spoke to Chris Buckley - who he says was really easy to speak to - he felt that he understood Paul's experience and gave him the opportunity to talk through his concerns. Chris recommended The Seeds project to him. Paul was interested primarily because it was targeted at over 50s and because he is a keen gardener. He'd begun to feel demoralised about his garden at home because squirrels had caused a lot of damage, but he liked the idea of meeting older people and of working together in a garden. Of Virginia he says "she was amazing - so welcoming, I connected immediately with her". The gardening itself was more basic than he'd been expecting, as quite a few of the others didn't have any previous experience, but he was impressed with how Mila helped make beginners feel at home, and was happy to join in, relax and get to know other members of the group. More recently he got involved in helping to create the U=U flower display, and is thrilled that this message is reaching a wider audience. He has suggested planting bulbs on the site at Calthorpe to recreate the message in spring time.

When the idea of gentle exercise, yoga and mindfulness classes was mooted, he was really keen to give them a try. He commented that Mel the mindfulness instructor has inspired him to put his previous knowledge about mindfulness in to practice, and loved how she brought humour to the class. He was very appreciative too of how hard Thien Tran, the yoga instructor, worked to help each individual in the class to improve. David Wyatt, one of the peer mentors, also introduced him to the Central YMCA. Although he hasn't started going regularly yet, he has always been a keen swimmer and is intending to register to start using the excellent pool there.

What has given him the most joy was the opportunity, after a visit to Kew Gardens, to suggest and organise a visit for the group to his local nature reserve followed by hosting them for tea at his house. The visit was a great success, and has prompted him to think about bringing people together again to enjoy classical music - a love of his that he would like to pursue more in his retirement.

While he still struggles with loneliness and sometimes doesn't feel like making the journey to the Calthorpe Community Garden, he says that Virginia's consistent encouragement (for example through a weekly message reminder) has helped him to keep to the routine of coming in, and that it has made a huge difference to his mental health. While he doesn't feel he can tell his family that he's living with HIV, he is able to share his experience of his gardening and exercise group with them on his regular visits there and this also feels very positive, especially as he manages the dilemma of whether he could move to be closer to them.

Ade was encouraged to get involved in Seeds by The Food Chain to help him with his depression, coping with the side effects of his medication, to get more exercise and meet new people going through a similar experience as him as an older person LHIV.

He had previously been involved in a gardening project for HIV+ black African men funded by Near Neighbours and based in Croydon, and with a horticulture project in Brent. There he had enjoyed planting and harvesting crops, and missed it after the funding ended a couple of years ago, so he was pleased to get back involved with another therapeutic project based around gardening. He was also impressed by the fact that it was a partnership, bringing together the expertise of the three organisations to help with "the mind and the body".

He has been the most frequent attendee - coming to a total of 41 sessions, and feels he has gained a huge amount from the programme. He loves the Calthorpe garden and how there are plants, and visitors from around the world there. He told me about the experience of planting and the pleasure of picking and using the herbs to make tea together at the end of the afternoon. He says: "good mental health, breaks away from loneliness, meet new friends, share experiences, learning new skills, what you learn you can use for your good diet. As an HIV+ person you need to eat well, so that the medication can work well." He has also appreciated being able to take healthy food that has been picked from the garden or donated at the Calthorpe, which has helped him to eat more healthily at home as he is on a low income and cannot always afford good quality food. The recent nutrition sessions have particularly helped him to manage his diagnosis of being pre-diabetic.

He has also been involved in the exercise, yoga and mindfulness classes at Seeds, and has now become part of the Positive Health programme at the YMCA benefitting from an additional two classes there each week as well.

He spoke with pride about being involved in the U=U display and the fact that the project has got international exposure at the London Fast Track Cities Initiative conference at the Barbican because the mobile display that he had been involved in creating was being shown there.

He got a great deal from the trips to Kew Gardens, and with Virginia's support was able to access leadership training there, which has qualified him to lead visitor groups, and helped to boost his self confidence.

Ade concludes, "it takes away my sadness and helps me become more positive".

Sophia first heard about The Seeds Project when she met Virginia at the YMCA, and joined the trip to Kew Gardens. A few weeks later she decided to go along to Calthorpe Community Garden. She had planted seeds to grow vegetables in the past, and wanted to know more about gardening. She said that it was immediately different to what she expected: "people were chatting, drinking tea, sharing ideas and planting at the same time. It helped with my depression - that I could come out and have people to talk to" When she started, along with gardening she also joined the trip organised by another group member to the Wetlands nature reserve and reservoir, she loved the long walk, learning about the reservoir from Virginia and the homemade cake and tea served by her fellow participant. When she joined the green gym exercise classes she really loved being able to learn outside, and found the exercises to help with balance particularly useful. She intends to use outdoor gym equipment in her local park when the weather improves. She got a lot out of the mindfulness techniques, and has signed up to a longer course with Mel to expand her knowledge and practice as another way to help manage depression and anxiety. During one of the central London excursions she asked for a photo to be taken to reassure her family that she was having fun even though her health was not great. Outside of the sessions she has also enjoyed talking via Whatsapp particularly when members have shared pictures of gardens they have visited.

Sophia describes Virginia as "looking after the group like a mother" and also appreciated the extra help and support she received from David Wyatt, the peer mentor, and another group member. She said that when she first started with The Seeds she was going downhill with anxiety and depression, feeling awful and overwhelmed. Normally she would keep it in, but this time she decided to tell Virginia and David who suggested that rather than going back to her GP (where the interventions had not worked well for her), she should tell the hospital. This led to a rapid referral to the psychiatrist, medication and therapeutic intervention she feels has worked much better. She has been able to tell friends what she is going through and found most much more supportive than she anticipated. If this hadn't happened, she says "I would have ended up in hospital, or I don't know what...."

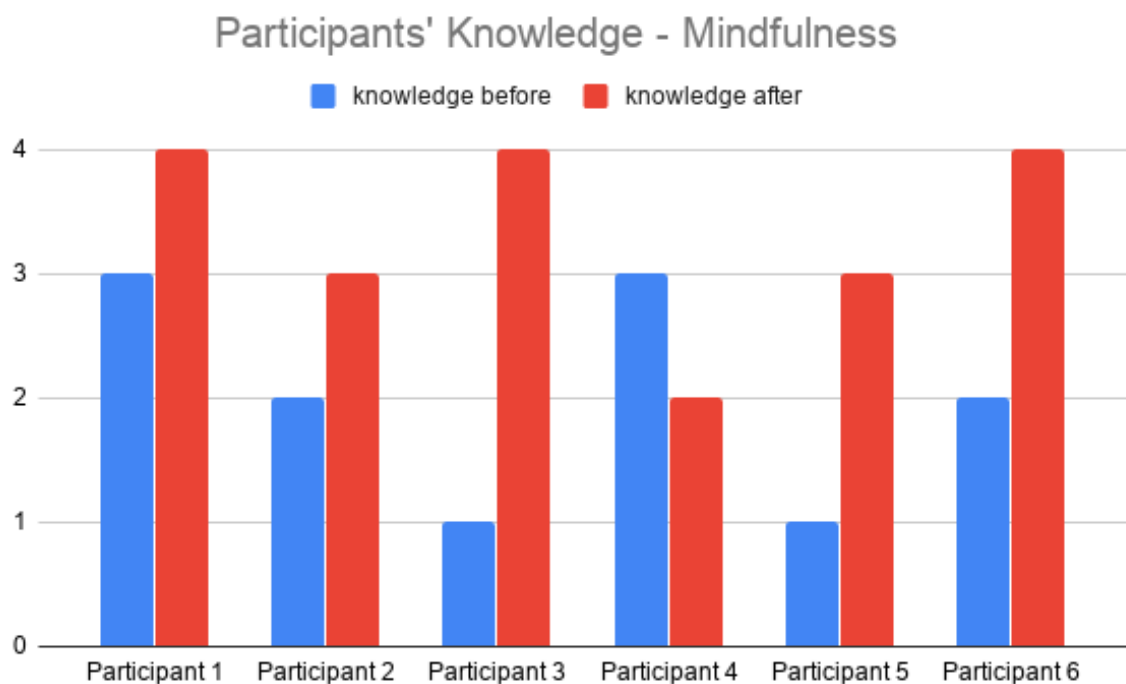
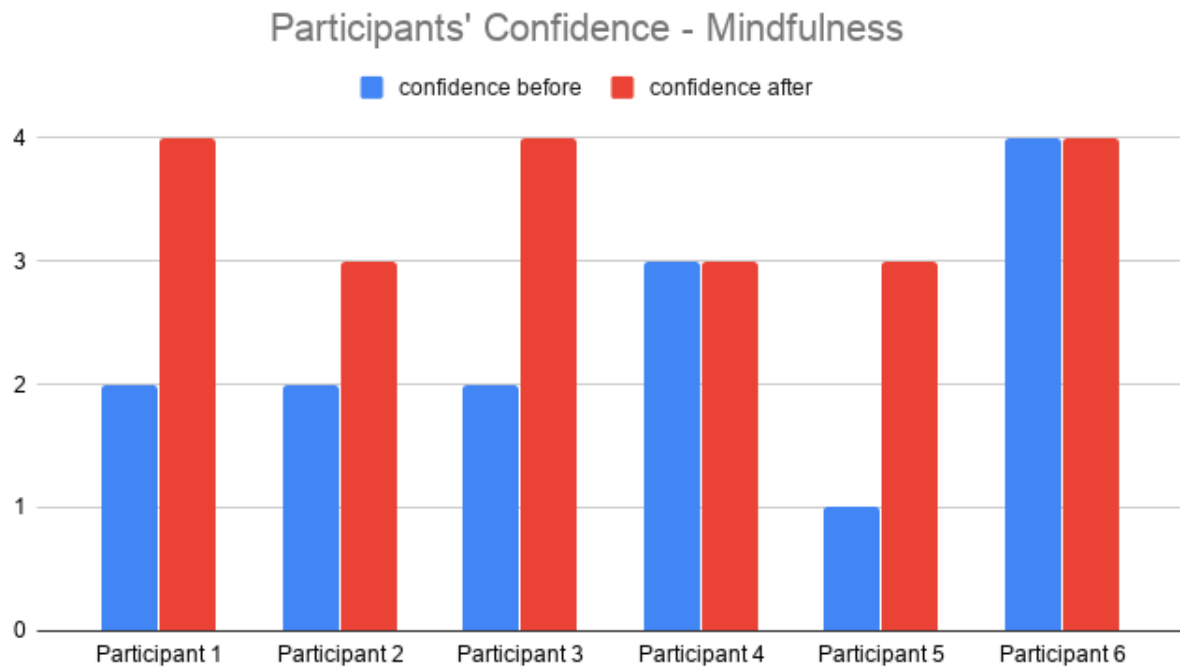
Of the nutrition sessions, she said she found them very informative, and as her concentration span is short it was helpful to have written information to read and use afterwards. She has rejoined The Food Chain programme to continue to help improve her diet. She learnt a lot about the uses (good and bad) of plants during garden trips and enjoyed being out of the pollution in the city -she'd love the opportunity to do more of these with the group.

While she still has very significant medical, mental health and family problems to cope with, she says that The Seeds Project has offered her hope for her future.

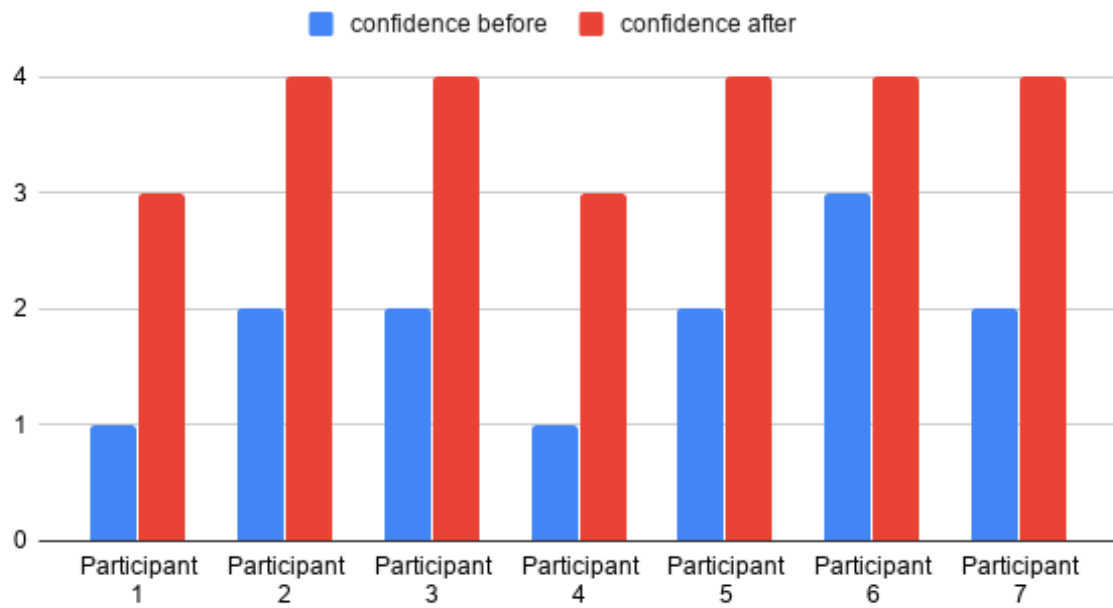
APPENDIX 3

SESSION FEEDBACK FORMS

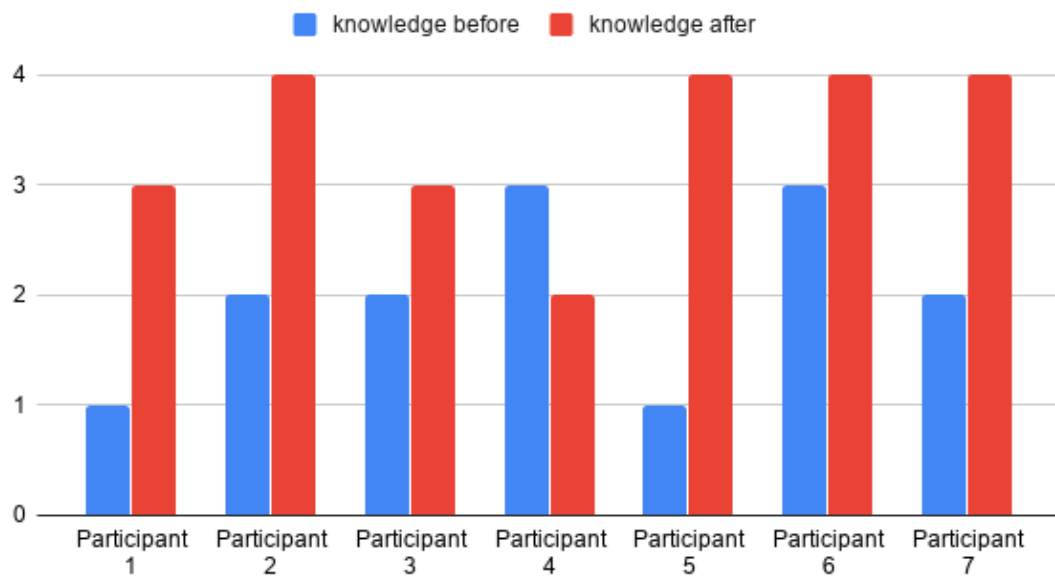
key: 0-none 1-very little 2-OK 3-good 4-excellent



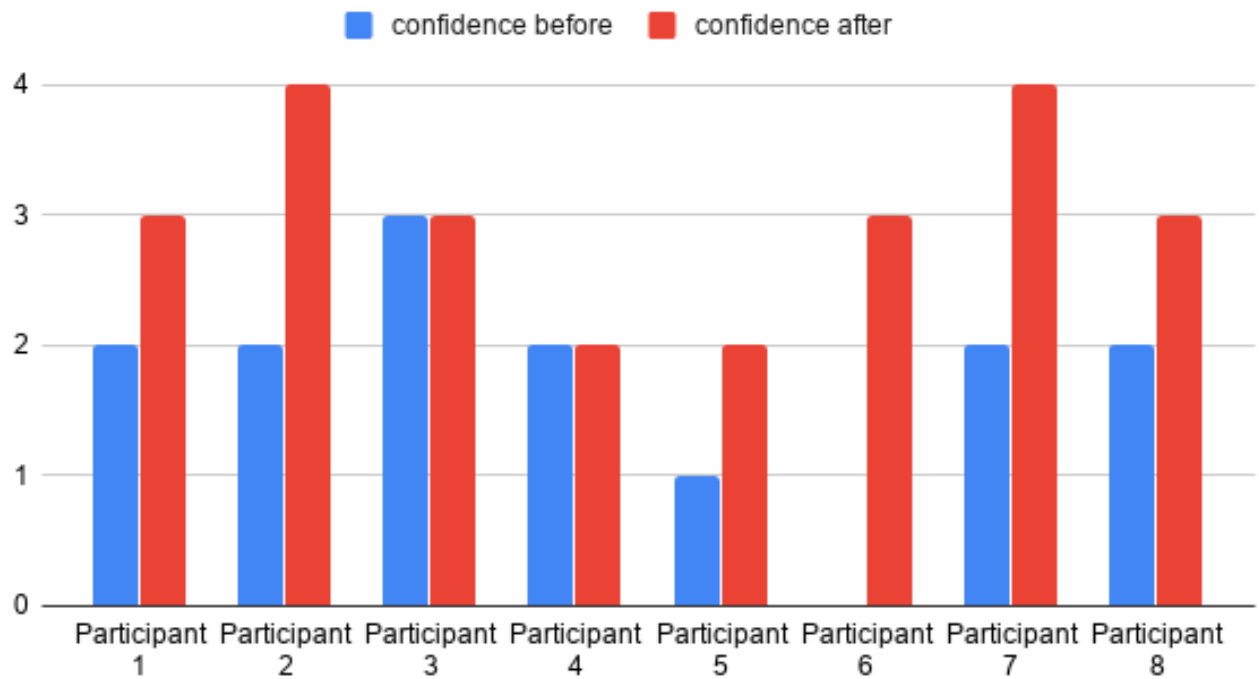
Participants' Confidence - Yoga



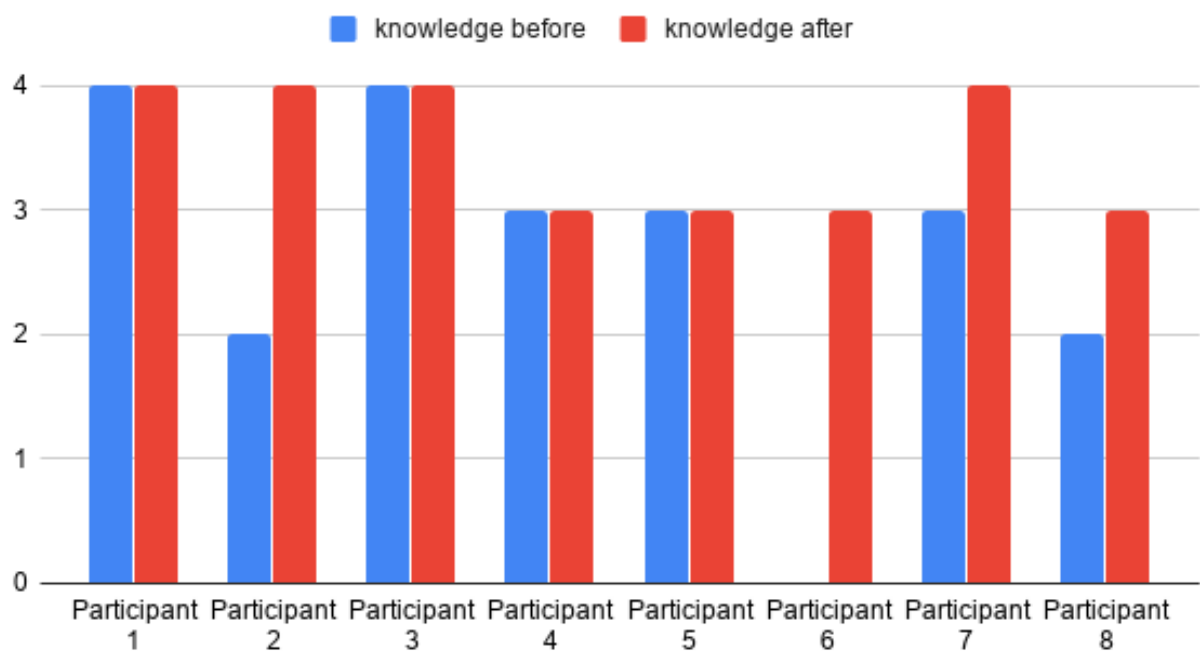
Participants' Knowledge - Yoga



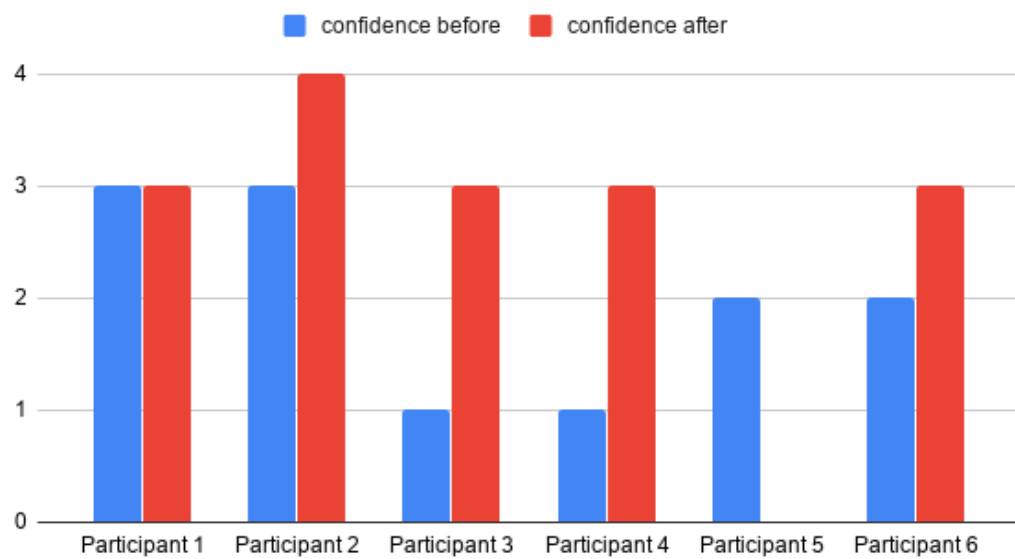
Participants' Confidence - Gardening



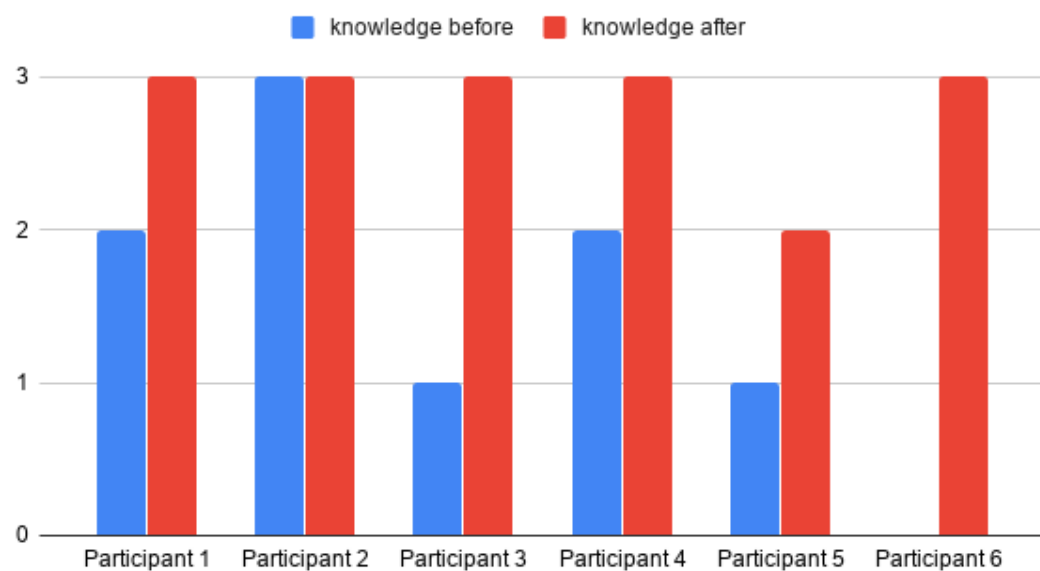
Participants' Knowledge - Gardening



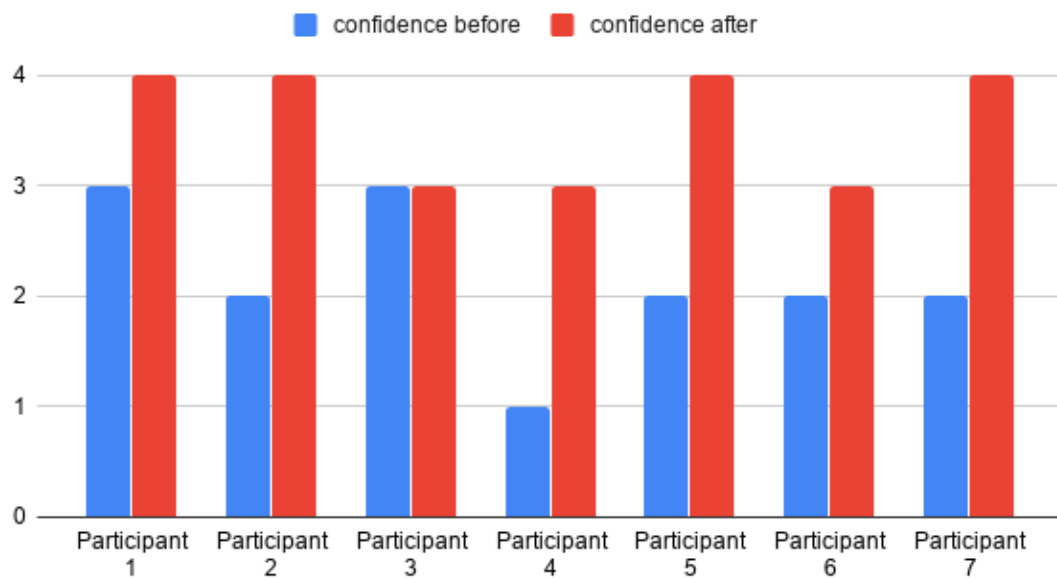
Participants' Confidence - Garden Visits (October 2019)



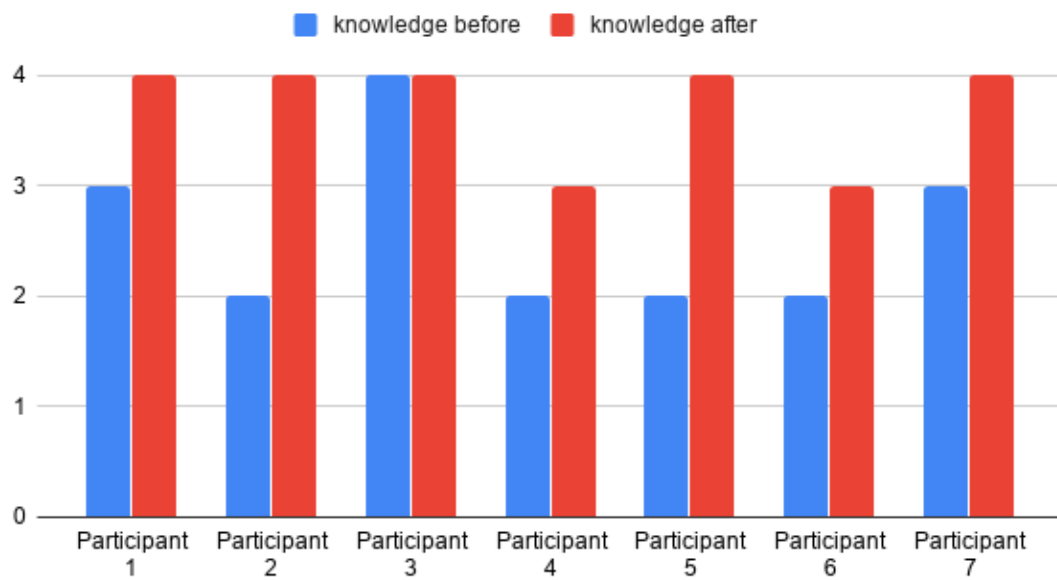
Participants' Knowledge - Garden Visits (October 2019)



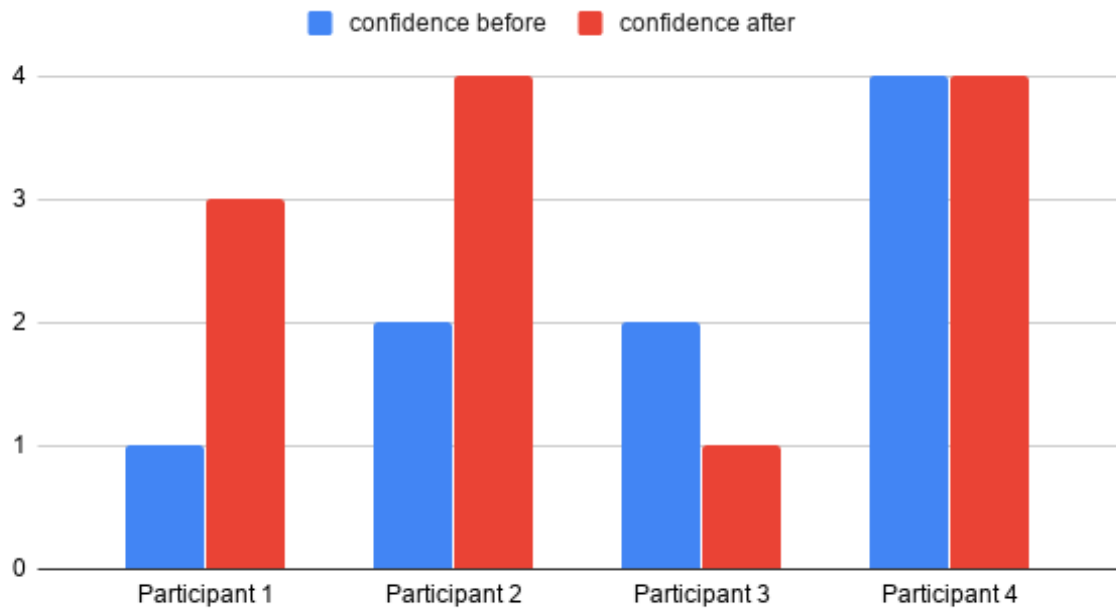
Participants' Confidence - NAM Wellbeing Talks



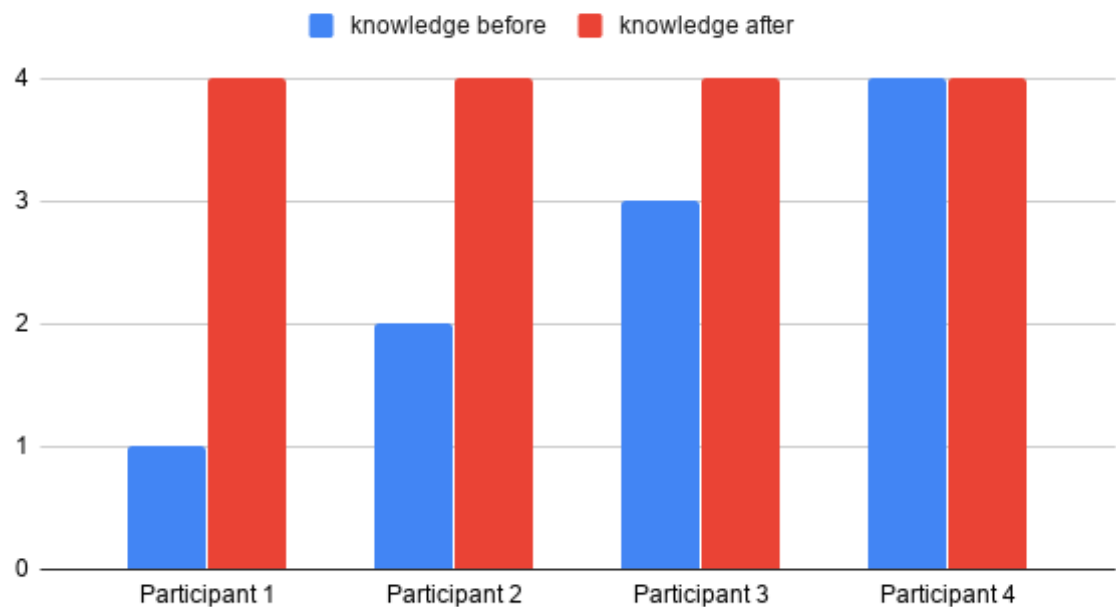
Participants' Knowledge - NAM Wellbeing Talks



Participants' Confidence - Cardio Vascular Exercise



Participants' Knowledge - Cardio Vascular Exercise



APPENDIX 4

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