

Evaluating the Social Impacts of Trees for Canterbury



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1.1 Research Question:

What are the social impacts experienced by those directly involved in Trees for Canterbury?

1.2 Context for Research:

improvement of horticultural working skills and effective team work skills. The majority of participants had told others about their experiences at TFC, would encourage others to get involved and most felt more connected to their communities following their participation in TFC.

1.6 Limitations:

Many of the individuals at the nursery had communicatory disabilities which meant they were not able to fully express themselves verbally while answering our surveys. As we needed quantifiable results we could only gather simplistic data from those who experienced the most significant social benefits from their time at TFC.

We felt that during the surveys individuals at the nursery may have tried to give us answers they thought we were looking for; although we tried not to prompt them their eagerness to please may have influenced the results.

Some of the surveys handed out at the plantings were only partially completed; leaving gaps in our data and limiting the accuracy of our analysis.

1.7 Future Research Suggestions:

More in-depth social data should be collected from semi-structures interviews with family and friends of disadvantaged individuals working at the nursery to gain a comprehensive understanding of how TFC could provide benefits for people with specific mental or educational disabilities.

A broader study should be undertaken to determine if or how organisations like TFC can promote social inclusion and acceptance of mentally and socially disadvantaged individuals in the wider community.

Researchers should aim to combine social and environmental impact data to measure the ecosystem benefits TFC has generated through their planting efforts and through encouraging environmentally conscious behaviour in the Canterbury community.

Trees for Canterbury (TFC) is an organisation that began as an environmental initiative to improve native biodiversity in Canterbury following the widespread ecological damage that took place during agricultural development. TFC has since been increasingly recognised for its social contributions. Our research is concerned with the social impacts experienced by those directly involved in TFC. We identified two main groups that may stand to gain social benefits from their involvement in the organisation. The first is those that are employed or volunteering at the nursery; these are most often socially or mentally disadvantaged individuals that are referred to TFC to gain employment opportunities or work experience. These individuals come from diverse backgrounds and have a range of educational, communicatory or developmental disabilities. TFC has the opportunity to create significant social benefits for these individuals by providing them with an empathetic, tolerant and supportive working environment that fosters empowerment and personal development

maximise these rewards may determine their effectiveness at increasing voluntary participation in the community (Chinman and Wandersman, 1999).

Authors such as Westphal (2003) have investigated the ways in which greening projects can foster

Hospital; all of which send mentally or socially disadvantaged clients to TFC to gain employment or work experience. Our group adjudicated an open discussion that was structured around pre-determined questions on the social impacts of TFC (Appendix 1). The session was recorded which allowed us to draw out interaction data and in-depth information from the discussion (Doody et al, 2013).

As the organisers at TFC emphasised the collection of quantifiable data we decided to use questionnaires to gather information on social impacts; as these would provide us with statistically valid representations of TFC participants (Secor, 2010). After brainstorming potential social impacts that TFC could be generating we formulated a 'framework for social benefits' to strategically measure the experience of these impacts by the individual (Westphal, 2003). After conducting the focus

communication with the organisations sending clients to the nursery. In addition to this some mentioned the non-judgemental and welcoming atmosphere that TFC created which had helped their clients settle in.

A comment was made on the direct and honest (albeit non politically-correct) nature of the TFC organisers which helped to prepare their clients for the 'real world'. This links in with the real-world skills that their clients were developing by working at the nursery such as money-handling and using public transportation. One participant mentioned a client that,

"wanted to be [at TFC] and so was prepared to learn those skills".

Another participant identified the development of work ethic as an important social impact of TFC. She described one client who had gone on to gain employment at a primary school and was constantly exceeding his paid hours in order to complete his job to the best of his ability. A further significant social impact identified by the focus group was that TFC gives participants

"a sense of belonging, or mana".

The focus group allowed us to draw on participants' understanding and experiences with mentally or socially disabled clients which proved invaluable to conducting our social research (Gibbs, 1997). We learned we needed to simplify the surveys for the workers at the nursery, explain the questions to them and use pictures to aid their understanding of the concepts. This enabled us to build up an empathetic understanding of our research participants; and to re-evaluate and adapt our methodology to be more sensitive and appropriate for the individuals at the TFC nursery (Montell, 1999).

We went through a simplified questionnaire with 19 workers at the nursery who were mentally or educationally disadvantaged. Visual aids were used to help participants answer the questions and results were then graphed accordingly. One of the key questions asked was whether or not participants felt their confidence had improved since working at the nursery. Their answers are presented in Figure 1. Significantly 77% of the 19 workers surveyed believed their confidence had increased a lot or at least to some degree (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Data presenting the increase or decrease in confidence levels of the individuals working at the Trees for Canterbury nursery.

Increasing confidence represents one of the most important social benefits that TFC provides for workers at the nursery. It is well recognised that increases in confidence can lead to an extensive range of further social benefits and enables individuals to pursue new opportunities and activities (Westphal, 2003). An increase in confidence furthers personal development and can substantially increase an individual's capacity to reach their own goals, whether that is to gain paid employment or improve their communication skills. The increases in confidence of the workers at the nursery that were witnessed in our results could be attributed to the supportive working environment that

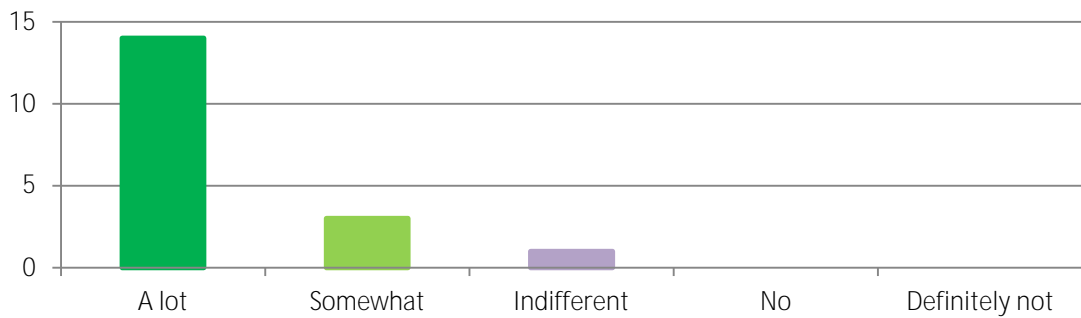


Figure 2: Data presenting to what extent individuals working at the Trees for Canterbury nursery felt they were part of the team.

In addition to this workers at the nursery were asked if they enjoyed coming to TFC. Enjoyment of the working environment is in itself a social benefit for those participating in the organisation. The majority of the 19 individuals surveyed strongly enjoyed their time at TFC (Figure 3). The survey results showed that 95% of workers at the nursery had made friends which would have contributed to their enjoyment of their experiences at TFC. This development of personal relationships is an important social benefit that TFC is generating for disadvantaged workers and was made evident to us during our observation of the comradely interactions between individuals at the nursery.

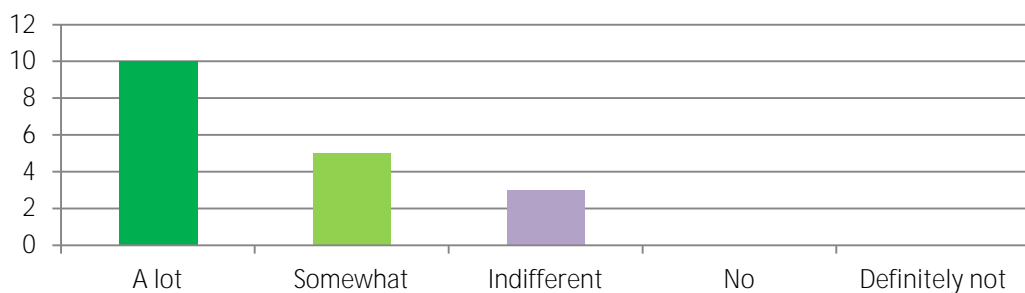


Figure 3: Data presenting the extent to which workers at the Trees for Canterbury nursery enjoyed their experiences there.

Promoting independence is a fundamentally important social benefit that TFC has the opportunity to provide for disadvantaged individuals. We asked the 19 survey participants whether or not they felt they were more able to do things for themselves as a result of their experiences at TFC. Of the individuals surveyed 88% said that they were more able to do things for themselves since coming to TFC (Figure 4). Some of the survey participants elaborated on this question and mentioned things such as "I am better with my time management such as knowing when my morning tea and lunch breaks are" or an individual would mention that since coming to TFC they have learned to make their own cup of tea or coffee. This has the dual benefit of helping disadvantaged individuals learn handy real-world skills while building the self-esteem that comes with being more self-sufficient. This is a valuable social benefit that TFC is able to provide for participants regarding further employment aspirations.

self-development which could ultimately lead to benefits such as improved job prospective (McIntosh, 2012). This highlights the potential for TFC to create long term social benefits in the community beyond the simple enjoyment of planting days. Qualities such as environmental understanding and teamwork can impact upon volunteers' employability, relationships, social networks and personal growth (Holmes, 2009; Summit and Sommer, 1997).

Survey participants were then asked to tick a box to show if other areas of their lives had been affected by these improved skills. We analysed how improvement of the three most cited skills by volunteers (environmental understanding, horticultural working skills and teamwork) had impacted other areas of their lives. Improvement of environmental understanding was found to affect personal growth more than any other area of the volunteers' lives (Figure 7).

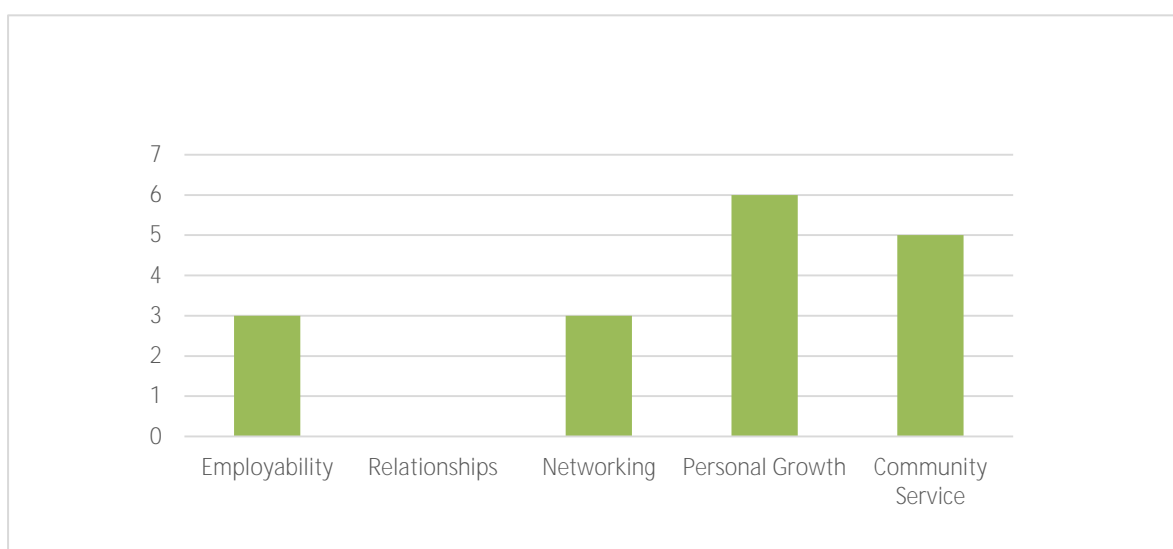


Figure 7: Data showing the areas of volunteers' lives that were affected by improved environmental understanding.

Activities such as volunteering can encourage personal growth which enhances personal understanding and self-development (Johnson and Geal, 2009). Personal growth is strongly associated with confidence; a notable impact that was shown in previous results with the TFC nursery workers.

Our results show that improvement of horticultural skills had impacted volunteers' employability more so than environmental understanding or teamwork (Figure 7, Figure 8, Figure 9). This emphasises the potential for practical skills to be refined during volunteering for TFC; with the additional benefit of volunteers increasing their employability (McIntosh, 2012). The transferable

skills learned from volunteering at TFC can be incorporated into many aspects of the volunteers' lives; as demonstrated below with horticultural skills enhancing the networking ability and community service of participants (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Data showing the areas of volunteers' lives tha

Figure 9: Data showing the areas of volunteers' lives that were most affected by improved team work skills.

This result is a strong indication that

the extensive social impacts on those who actively participated in tree-plantings; as we were able to demonstrate that volunteers carried qualities such as environmental consciousness and transferable skills into other aspects of their lives. This reflects TFC's effectiveness at fostering empowerment and initiating a spread of social and environmental consciousness into the wider community. Further research in this area should combine social and environmental data to determine TFC's effectiveness at initiating a cultural shift towards ecologically responsible behaviour.

We would like to extend our warmest thanks to everyone who participated in our research project.

Particular thanks to the friendly employees at the Trees for Canterbury nursery and to -4(e)-3(s)11(o)-5(cialn)13F

Secor, A.J. (2010) Social Surveys, Interviews, and Focus Groups. In Gomez, B., Jones, J. P. (eds) (pp. 194-205). Wiley-

Focus group discussion questions

Engagement questions.

How did you first hear about Trees for Canterbury (TFC)?
Why did you become involved in TFC? What aspects were appealing to your organisation?
What has been your overall impression of the TFC organisation? Specifically referring to social impacts.

Impact questions

Covering all aspects, what are the impacts that TFC has had on those directly involved at TFC from your organisations?
Need to mention that these are both positive and negative aspects and try to have the conversation that includes the social and educational aspects. Keep on track with these areas of interest. Unexpected impacts.

Community questions

How do you think these social impacts affect the wider community?
How effective do you think the TFC organization is at generating broader scale impacts compared to other organizations in the same caliber? E.g. environmental/ social/ community building.

Recommendation Questions

How could TFC improve the level of individual and community benefits through their organization?
How could the organization enhance the level of social impacts experienced by the individuals?
If you were doing this research is there anything else you would have included? (in order to get the social benefits)

Questionnaire

Do you have any comments or suggestions regarding our questionnaire?
Things to get:

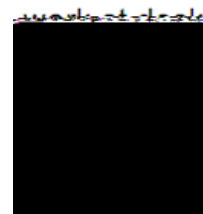
Answer parts of the questionnaire.

Questionnaire for workers at the nursery

TREES FOR CANTERBURY QUESTIONNAIRE

Age: _____

Gender: M / F



Do you have job outside of TFC? _____

What do you do at TFC?

How long have you been at TFC?

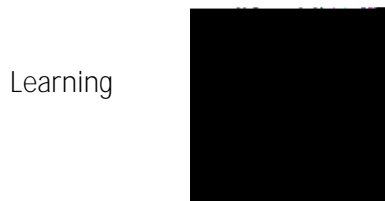
- under 3 months - 3-5 months - over 5 months

- years _____

How many hours a week are you at TFC?

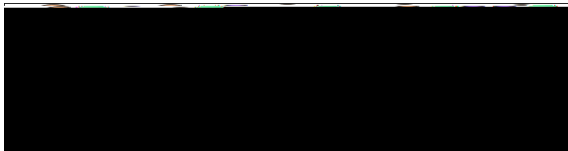
under 5 5-10 10-20 20-40 40+

What do you like about TFC?



Is there anything else you like about TFC?

Do you enjoy coming to TFC?

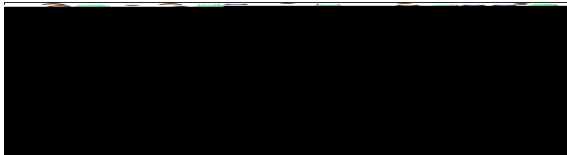


Do you help TFC?

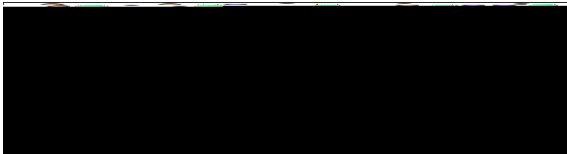
Have you made friends?

YES / NO

Are you more happy/brave (confident) because of working at TFC?



Do you feel like you are part of the team at TFC?



Occupation: _____

Highest level of education: _____

How did you first hear about Trees for Canterbury (TFC)?

What is your main role while at TFC?

What is the length of your service with TFC?

- under 3 months - 3-5 months - over 5 months

- years _____

On average how much time do you spend contributing to TFC per week?

under 5 5-10 10-20 20-40 40+

Why did you choose TFC over other voluntary organisations?

What was the main reason you decided to become involved in TFC?

To help improve Canterbury's natural environment and vegetation

To meet people in your community

To get outdoors and active

You e

Petrol : Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Greatly
 Time: Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Greatly
 Transportation: Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Greatly
 Other inconvenience :

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Greatly

Do these factors ever deter you from going to TFC?

YES / NO

To what extent are your reasons for staying involved in TFC?

The friends you've made or people you get to work with

Doesn't apply 1 2

Because you're committed to improving Canterbury's natural environment

Doesn't apply 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly applies*

You enjoy helping communities with their 'greening' projects

Doesn't apply 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly applies*

You like to stay active

Doesn't apply 1 2 3 4 5 *Strongly applies*

Other

Doesn't apply 1

How much do you anticipate that you will volunteer over the next 12 months?

LESS / MORE

Have you told any of your friends or family about your experiences at TFC?

YES / NO

Would you encourage others to participate and get involved with TFC?

YES / NO

What suggestions would you make to improve peoples' experiences at TFC?

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-
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