UNIVERSITY of STIRLING

Greenspace Programme Outcomes and Evaluation Guidance

To be read in conjunction with the guidance manual document

Evaluation and how to measure outcomes

This document has been created for practitioners to provide guidance around evaluation of greenspace programmes for people with poor mental health and substance use challenges. For details about the wider project and how data were gathered, please consult the main guidance manual.

Why is evaluation important?

Evaluation is not always necessary, but organisations might want to show how their programme is benefiting participants. It's crucial to select evaluation methods that are appropriate, meaningful, and tailored to participants' needs and preferences. Our research, as well as wider literature, shows a number of benefits to evaluation including:

1. Providing evidence of the benefits for the individuals taking part

Capturing a programme's benefits can help secure funding by demonstrating effectiveness and building evidence for greenspace programmes more generally. This can increase support and visibility among wider health professionals, policymakers, commissioners, and other stakeholders. This approach is often called 'impact evaluation'.

2. Understanding how a programme works and how it can be improved

Evaluation also provides insight into how a programme works and how it could be improved. This form of evaluation, often called 'process-based evaluation', facilitates improvement and adaptation.

3. Facilitating reflection and reinforcing progress

Evaluation can highlight individuals' progress, identify areas for development, and foster feelings of achievement.

What are some of the barriers to evaluation?

Evaluation can be challenging for several reasons. Participants might be reluctant to engage in time-intensive methods or feel they are being 'examined'. Evaluation can demand time from staff/volunteers, who may view it as hindering outdoor activities. Based on our research, we can suggest some initial starting points to address these challenges:

1. Pick an evaluation strategy suitable for the type and level of evidence needed

Programmes may need different levels of evidence based on funders' requirements. Prioritise simple evaluation methods that minimise participant time where possible but, for deeper insights, use methods integrated into sessions that participants may enjoy.

2. Adapt your approach according to group and individual preferences and needs

Evaluation is not one-size-fits-all. Consider the group and tailor methods to their preferences, offering options for in-depth or shorter evaluations while respecting their choices.

3. Be collaborative and participatory

Discussing the purposes of evaluation with participants, seeking their suggestions, and designing 'hands-on' approaches (where people feel they can contribute in the way they would like) can provide meaningful information. Participants should feel that evaluation is being done with them, not to them.

Who could be involved in evaluation?

While programme participants are the primary group, others could also be included and provide important input. Depending on the type of evaluation you are doing, you might want to think about involving different groups Below are considerations of different groups:

1. Programme participants

While participants' views are key, they may hesitate to engage in evaluation, seeing it as taking time from their activities or due to past institutional distrust. Concerns about anonymity and data use are also common. Here are simple-to-implement ways to address these issues:

- *Explaining the importance and purpose of evaluation:* Informing participants that feedback helps to improve the programme by showing what works and what needs improvement can reduce apprehension.
- *Emphasising collaboration:* Asking participants how they wish to provide information is crucial for meaningful participation. When people feel heard and their input is valued, they are more likely to engage.
- *Avoiding over-reliance on quantitative methods:* While methods like self-report questionnaires provide valuable evidence, it's important to avoid overreliance on them as participants can find these methods overly clinical.
- *Being transparent about how the information is used and seeking consent:* Provide clear information on how data will be used, anonymised, and shared. Always seek participants' consent, formally or informally, based on the data type and use.

2. Staff/volunteers

Staff understand a programme's benefits, which can inform process and impact evaluations, but their input may be seen as biased due to vested interests. This should be considered, however, staff reflections can supplement participant data well.

3. Wider support workers, referrers, or other relevant professionals

Consulting participants' support workers, referral organisations, or other professionals can reveal greenspace programme impacts, such as improved well-being, confidence, or recovery steps. Insights are typically best when professionals with established relationships with participants can assess progress over time.

4. Family members

Family members can provide valuable insights into how a programme has impacted attendees, given their close relationship. However, complex family dynamics require careful consideration to justify family involvement. Our research highlighted that end-of-programme events, where participants could invite family, may allow input while respecting these dynamics.

5. Documenting outputs and/or changes to settings

Staff/volunteers should document programme aspects like participants' outputs (e.g., crafts, conservation work) and environmental improvements. These community benefits, though often overlooked, are often important in greenspace evaluations.

Thinking about outcomes and 'outcome measures'

The main guidance manual outlines outcomes that happen on greenspace programmes for people with poor mental health and substance use challenges. These happen in response to mechanisms in certain contexts (see main guidance manual for further detail). Outcomes that were identified can be split into three categories: nature-related, individual changes, and social relationships (Figure 1). These outcomes were identified through interviews with staff/volunteers, programme participants, wider stakeholders, like strategic decision makers, and through literature reviewing. They were then refined through organisational feedback and additional interviews.

Figure 1: Outcomes for greenspace programme

Nature-based Outcomes

- Connection to nature
- Mental refreshment/ invigoration
- Peace and serenity
- Space for reflection
- Drawing on nature as a metaphor
- Mindfulness

Individual Outcomes

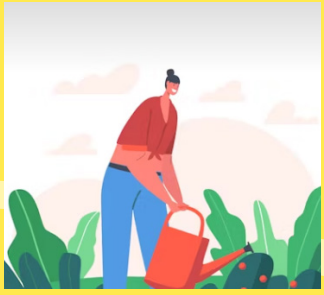
- Reduce stress
- Self-acceptance
- Self-efficacy
- Perceived resilience
- Improved confidence/self-esteem
- Achievement, pride and personal development
- Improved routine and self-care
- Motivation for change and goal setting
- Reduced substance use/ steps towards recovery
- Improved mental health, wellbeing and quality of life
- Learning practical and emotional skills
- Increased physical activity
- Employment, education, volunteering and training
- Meaning, purpose and spirituality-based outcomes

Social Outcomes

- Social connection
- Mutual support
- Opening up to others
- Learning from others
- Sense of belonging
- Feeling valued, safe, respected and not judged
- Reduced social isolation
- Community integration and involvement
- Improved social relationships (on our outside of programme)
- Reduced stigma

Participants felt the outcomes in Figure 1 covered greenspace programme benefits but suggested adding administrative outcomes (e.g., numbers attending) and wider social and environmental impacts. They emphasised the importance of capturing benefits like restored spaces for community use through written records of activities, before-and-after photos, and inviting funders, referrers, and other stakeholders to visit. Wider social impacts often connect to individual outcomes, such as pride and achievement from contributing to the community. It is also important to note that some outcomes of interest may not be listed, may take much longer to measure than others, and/or may not be measurable. Organisations should discuss what is realistic given their resources.



Recovery outcomes

Participants highlighted greenspace programmes as supportive resources for sustaining recovery, understood through the lens of 'recovery capital'. This is defined as individual, social, and/or community resources aiding substance use recovery and quality of life. Table 1 summarises participants' perspectives on building recovery capital through greenspace programmes:

Table 1: Participant views on how greenspace programmes could improve recovery capital across levels.

Individual-level capital
Mood and helping with triggers and stressors • Improved mood after taking part in a greenspace session can reduce cravings and support individuals in dealing with challenging events. • Development of strategies for dealing with triggers and stressors, including breathing exercises, mindfulness and being in nature. • Improved routine and self-care practices, such as increased exercise and better sleep and/or diet. **Attitudes and beliefs** • Increased self-acceptance, and reductions in guilt and blame. • Sense of hope and belief that change is possible. • Increased motivation for change. • Opportunity to engage in meaningful and enjoyable activities. • Shift in sense of identity and self-perception. **Human capital (education, skills and health)** • Opportunity to develop practical, social, and emotional skills. • Increased confidence to continue to learn and develop skills (e.g., volunteering or entering further education). • Increased confidence to engage with nature. **Physical capital** • Increased access to nature.
Social-level capital
• Opportunity to engage in social activities. • Improved relationships with family. • Reduced social isolation. • Improved connections with others leading to mutual support and shared experience. • Trust and relationships with facilitators. • Increased social confidence. • Positive changes to existing social network (as a result of changing attitudes).
Community/broader environmental capital
• Opportunities to engage with other community groups, resources, and services. • Increased trust and improved relationships with drug and alcohol service staff. • Cultural capital allowing changes to attitudes towards valuing and accepting different forms of social interaction and support.

Outcome measures for evaluation

Whichever outcomes an organisation chooses to focus on, it is important to consider how to explore or 'measure' this, so the changes experienced on a programme and/or benefits of programmes can be documented and communicated. To provide guidance with this, we identified evaluation methods through an iterative process, testing them for acceptability and feasibility. Initial methods were sourced from a literature review on greenspace programmes. Interviews with participants then assessed the suitability of these methods. This section summarises findings on the selected evaluation methods, divided into two sub-sections: building a basic evaluation and building a more in-depth evaluation.

Building a basic evaluation

Some organisations may prefer quick, simple ways to gather evidence without requiring in-depth evaluation. Table 2 offers suggestions for a basic evaluation approach. This basic approach is designed for staff/organisations seeking a ready-made evaluation template. However, very brief evaluation may show how things are going, but may not be enough detail for some funders, so consideration around the evaluation requirements is important.

Table 2: Basic evaluation guidance

Capturing the impact of programme
If you want to capture some quantitative (numerical information) on how your programme has impacted people, you may want to ask some basic questions before and after each session and then record/compare these scores. Some ideas given were:
Smiley/frown faces or emojis Provide smiley/frown faces (and other emotions) and ask participants to identify the ones which best suit how they are feeling (before and after a session). This can be converted into numbers for analysis, with each face given a score on a Likert-scale.
Score yourself 1 (poor) – 5 (very good) Ask participants to score themselves based on their mood/how they are feeling (1-5) before and after a session.
Placing a pinecone/stone Ask participants to place an object like a stone or pinecone in a certain box (with different emotions/ moods/scores), at the start and end of a session.
Basic Yes/No questions Ask participants some basic yes or no questions at the end of sessions. This could include questions such as: 'have you enjoyed today?'; 'has this been good for you?'; 'would you come back?'; 'would you recommend this programme to others?'
You can supplement this data with some qualitative information (which provides more detail about how people are feeling). Participants provided some suggestions of how to do this:
Pick a word which best describes… Ask participants to pick a word which best describes how they are feeling (either before and after, or solely after a session). Prompts could be provided by having cards with different words. Ensure a range of negative/positive/moderate words or emotions.
Post-it notes, comments/suggestions boxes, and big pieces of paper At the end of a session or full programme, staff could ask participants to write any reflections, thoughts and suggestions on post it notes to stick on a board, provide a suggestions box, or encourage writing/drawing on a large sheet of paper.
Capturing key quotes There may be occasions when discussion centres on how the programme is helping or supporting someone. Asking a participant if it is okay to jot down (paraphrasing or full quote) some of the key points can be a good way of capturing ad-hoc reflections and data.

Table 2: Basic evaluation guidance (continued)

Recording administrative data

As well as capturing information about the impact of a programme, you could record some basic administrative data. Funders are often interested in the number of people the programme is reaching and potentially some demographic information about who has taken part. Some funders may say this information is compulsory. You may want to record the following:

- How many people have attended each session and the programme in total?
- How many attend all/most sessions?
- What are the demographics of people attending (gender, ethnicity, age)?
- Has there been any referral or supported signposting to other services at the end of programme? How many have taken this up?
- If offered on the programme, have participants worked towards or gained any qualifications/ certificates from taking part?

Building on the basics

To enhance the basic evaluation approach above, consider the following methods. This list is not exhaustive but offers a few suggestions for consideration. Detailed information on these methods, along with important considerations regarding planning and anonymity, can be found later in the document.

More in-depth qualitative methods

Inviting participants to discuss their experiences with the programme and documenting key points from these conversations can provide more detailed and richer data.

Testimonial videos

Some participants may be happy to take part in a short recording/video where they discuss the programme, what it involved and how it has supported them. With their consent, these videos can also be used to generate interest and support among potential participants and referrers.

Key case studies and personal stories

Some participants may also be happy for staff to write up a short case study on the progress they have made through engaging with the programme.

Creative methods

This can involve a range of different activities such as photography, videoing, journalling or art. A key benefit of this approach is that it can be built into sessions, lessening the time burden on staff and participants. One of the simplest ways of integrating some of this into an evaluation approach is to use photographs from programmes.

Using social media data

Many groups/organisations may have social media pages (Facebook, Instagram) or communication channels (WhatsApp), and these can provide good quotes or other information, demonstrating engagement in the programme. It is important to gain consent for this information to be used and to protect anonymity.

Optional evaluation forms

It may be helpful to hand out a short (online or physical) evaluation form with some basic questions. This can be optional, so that those who do not wish to fill it out are not pressured to do so.

Building a more in-depth evaluation

Some organisations may opt for more in-depth evaluation. Below, we detail various potential methods, highlighting their advantages and challenges. Organisations may wish to combine different measures so they can build up a picture of how the programme works. This will be dependent on time available, resources, staffing, the purpose of the evaluation, and perceived acceptability of different measures. Participant feedback on each method was sought to ensure acceptability for participants, staff/volunteers, and funders.

Self-report questionnaires

Self-report questionnaires ask individuals to score themselves on specific outcomes, with many questionnaires available for different focus areas. This method helps measure programme impacts, often important to funders. However, challenges include participants feeling pressured to give expected responses, such as improved mental health. This may be especially difficult for small programmes where close staff-participant relationships may impact confidentiality.

Picking an appropriate questionnaire

Some evaluations combine multiple questionnaires to cover various outcomes, but this can be too lengthy for participants. A shorter, holistic questionnaire is often seen as more appropriate. Validity refers to whether a questionnaire measures what it intends to measure. Here are three examples of validated questionnaires that are short, easy to use, and available at low or no cost:

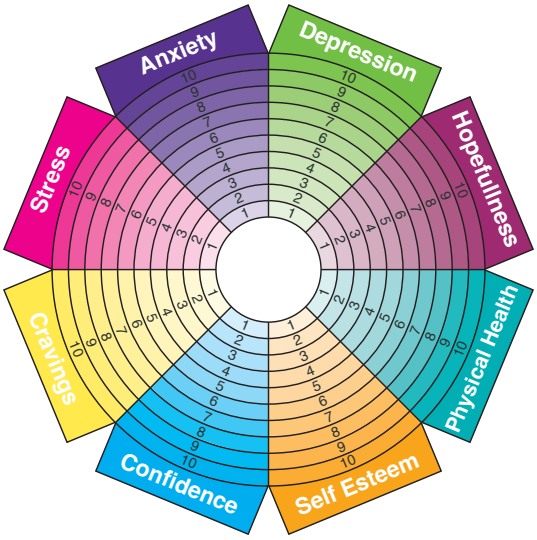
1. **'Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale' (WEMWBS):** Widely used, free (but a license is needed), easy to score, and includes only 14 items. It has been effective in greenspace programmes for individuals with mental health and substance use challenges. A shorter version is also available.
2. **The 'Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale':** Free, widely used, and has only 10 items. Though it focuses solely on self-esteem, this is a key area for individuals facing mental health and substance use challenges.
3. **'Nature Relatedness Scale':** Free, easy to score, and measures connection to nature with 21 items (or a shorter 6-item version). Programmes may prefer a scale which provides more direct measurement of wellbeing, health or recovery since a limitation is that it only addresses nature connection, rather than broader wellbeing or recovery. However, connection to nature is a vital part of most greenspace programmes so this scale may be of interest to many.

Wellbeing wheel

Instead of, or alongside validated questionnaires, a 'wellbeing wheel' is a self-report tool commonly used in the mental health and substance use field. It asks participants to rate themselves across areas like substance use, mental health, and personal development. Easy to administer, it captures diverse outcomes without requiring multiple questionnaires. Though not validated, a wellbeing wheel can effectively present outcomes to funders, especially when paired with other evaluation methods. It can also serve as a conversational tool, facilitating discussions between staff/volunteers and participants. Figure 2 shows an example tailored for greenspace activities involving individuals with mental health and substance use challenges. The wheel measures eight outcomes: hopefulness, physical health, self-esteem, confidence, cravings, stress, anxiety, and depression. Participants score their current and desired states initially, which are compared to a single post-intervention score. Progress can also be tracked with multiple scores during the programme.

Figure 2. Example of a wellbeing wheel (1 = very poor, 10 = excellent), developed by Hugh Asher at ***https://silvotherapy.co.uk/***

Scoring yourself at the START of the programme. Please score yourself in **RED** for **WHERE YOU ARE NOW** in each area. Draw a line above the number that best represents how you feel. Next score yourself in **GREEN** for **WHERE YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE**.



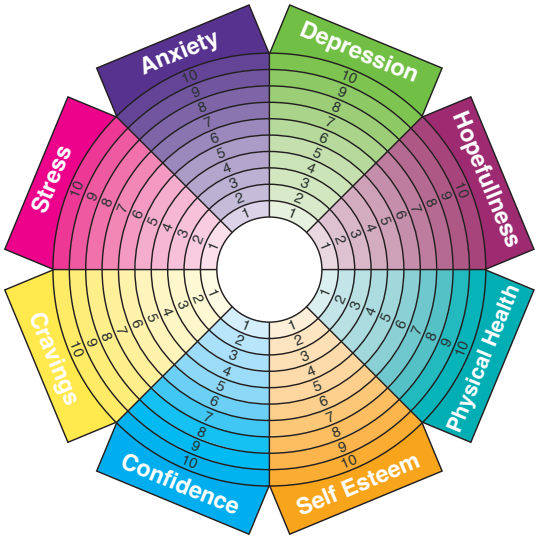
Hopefulness: Think about how positive you feel about the future. Do you believe that you can make the changes you want to? Do you have things to look forward to?

Physical Health: Think about your physical health. Are you happy with your level of fitness, your diet, the amount of sleep you get, or the amount of execise you take?

Self Esteem: Think about how you feel about yourself. Do you usually see yourself positively?

Confidence: Think about how confident you feel about maintaining your recovery and taking on the challenges that life throws at you.

Scoring yourself at the END of the programme. Please score yourself for **WHERE YOU ARE NOW** in each area. Draw a line above the number that best represents how you feel.



Cravings: How well do you feel that you are able to deal with triggers and cravings that might get in the way of your recovery?

Stress: Think about how you're coping with day-to-day life. Stress often makes you feel overwhelmed and can be a sign that your capacity to cope is stretched.

Anxiety: How worried are you about the future? Anxiety is a sense of fear or dread that something terrible is going to happen.

Depression: How would you rate your overall mood? Do you feel resilient enough to cope with life's ups and downs. Does your current mood affect your sleep?

Participants told us that there were two main ways in which a wellbeing wheel could be filled out:

1. ***Participants score without the input of staff***
   Participants complete the wellbeing wheel without staff input, either after sessions or at home. This approach reduces staff influence, promoting more honest self-assessments. However, it limits the wheel's use as a reflective tool and may pose challenges for participants with literacy challenges.

2. ***Individuals are supported by staff to fill out the wheel***
   Staff/volunteers assist participants in scoring, allowing discussions on each category. While participants may feel pressured to give positive scores, this approach fosters deeper understanding and rationale behind scores given and could help identify support needs and goals.

Considerations around self-report questionnaires for drop-in versus structured programmes

Programs may be drop-in, where individuals attend as and when they can, or are more structured and require commitment to attend sessions over time. Self-report questionnaires usually work best for structured programmes, allowing outcomes to be measured at the start, during, and end. Drop-in programmes may need to focus on immediate impacts, using simple questions such as those relating to mood improvement.

Perceived acceptability/feasibility of self-report questionnaires from the point of view of interview participants

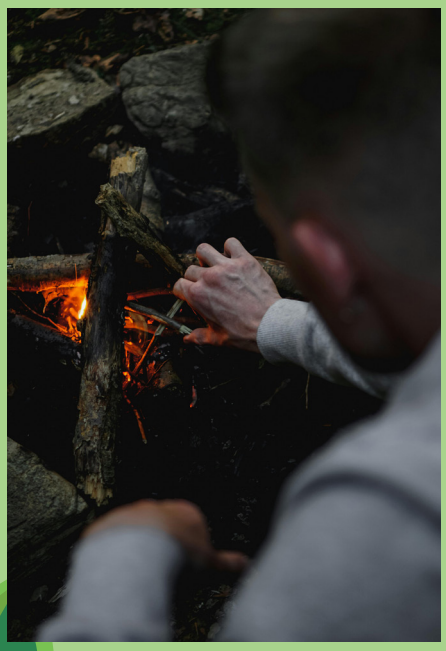
Interview participants had mixed views on the acceptability and feasibility of self-report questionnaires. An advantage is they measure programme impact and facilitate reflection, helping to identify personal goals and support needs. Staff/volunteers noted that scores could motivate programme participants by showing progress. Programme participants reported that well-chosen questionnaires are easy to complete and understandable. Additionally, compared to interviews, wellbeing wheels can be administered to multiple participants at once, offering numerical evidence quickly.

However, challenges include discomfort with filling out forms, especially if seen as overly clinical and associated with traditional treatment approaches. Most programme participants said they preferred conversational (qualitative) methods of evaluation over self-scoring. Additionally, questionnaires often capture mood at a specific moment, requiring frequent scoring to reflect long-term wellbeing, and this may be seen as overburdening programme participants. Additionally, programme participants may seek greenspace programmes as an escape from their issues, and being asked to continually reflect on these challenges could compromise this sense of escape.

A trusting relationship with staff/volunteers is essential during evaluation, as some programme participants may struggle to open up and score themselves honestly, especially if they are facing significant challenges. Staff and participants may also have different understandings of questionnaire categories, and some programme participants explained that they would find it difficult to give areas of their life a numerical rating. This highlights the need for adequate time to discuss any uncertainties. Finally, programme participants may receive various supports and interventions that cumulatively improve wellbeing, making it difficult to identify the specific benefits of greenspace programmes using self-report questionnaires alone. This underscores the need to complement self-report questionnaires with other evaluation methods that can capture richer and more nuanced data on the direct impact of greenspace programmes.

Summary and key tips for self-report questionnaires

- It is important to make clear that participation in the process is voluntary. While this may limit the ability to gather complete data for evaluation, prioritising a non-authoritative and person-centred approach is essential.
- It is important to explain the purpose of the questionnaire to individuals, provide clear guidance on how to score, and emphasize the importance of honesty, assuring them that their scores will not be judged.
- Its important to consider the method of scoring (independently or with staff/volunteers) and the advantages and drawbacks of each. Being aware of individual literacy and support needs is important.
- Ideally, a baseline score should be collected at the start of the programme, with another score gathered at the end to allow for comparison. Additionally, a few scores could be collected throughout the programme to minimize the influence of current stress or negative mood on single participant scores. However, it is important to ensure that participants are not overburdened.
- Making the questionnaire colourful and allowing it to be scored in coloured pen may encourage participation.
- Having an explanatory key that defines each category and provides examples of how to score them can help ensure consistency and accuracy.



Qualitative methods

Qualitative (non-numerical) methods can include interviews (individual or group), testimonies/narratives, and case studies. It should be noted that creative/participatory methods can overlap with qualitative methods but are discussed separately below.

Interviews/recording informal conversations

Interviews and conversations can offer deeper insights into programme impact compared to quantitative approaches like questionnaires, but they may be limited by time and resources. Staff could document key quotes from informal conversations (with permission) and collaborate with participants to reflect on and share their experiences, capturing qualitative feedback effectively.

The power of narratives and human stories

Capturing people's stories about how and why greenspace programs have impacted them can be a powerful form of evidence. These stories can serve multiple purposes, including providing evidence to funders and referrers, improving and adapting programme aspects, and sharing testimonials with potential future participants.

How to plan qualitative methods

Our literature review and interviews informed the questions in Table 3 to guide qualitative methods. Feedback during interviews on their appropriateness and relevance led to revisions, ensuring they are acceptable and feasible. This list serves as a starting point; organisations can tailor it to their programme's specific needs and focus.

Table 3: Ideas of qualitative questions

- Can you tell me about your experiences of nature on the programme? Do you think engaging with nature has had an impact on you? Are there ways in which you will engage with nature outside of the programme?
- Can you tell me about your social experiences on the programme and how you have found it interacting with others?
- What have you liked about the programme?
- What are the most important benefits you have experienced from engaging?
- Is there anything you would change about the programme/what is something you would like to see in the future on the programme?
- What did you learn from the programme that you didn't know before? What skills have you developed?
- What has been your biggest takeaway from taking part?
- Would you recommend this programme to others? Why?
- What have you learned on the programme that you are now putting in practice in your life?

Perceived acceptability and feasibility of qualitative methods from the point of view of interview participants

Qualitative methods were generally seen as acceptable, feasible, and valuable for gathering evidence about the impact of greenspace programmes. Staff/volunteers said they could provide in-depth insights into greenspace programme impacts, offering programme participants a validating opportunity to share their experiences. Programme participants reported they felt heard and appreciated this detailed feedback process.

However, there were some reported challenges. Some participants found it uncomfortable to discuss challenges or potential programme improvements. Building trust and fostering an open environment for constructive feedback was seen as essential. Informal, conversational approaches were preferred over formal interviews for their relaxed and less 'evaluative' nature which allowed programme participants to feel more comfortable.

Aside from personal stories and interview-type questions, participants suggested a few other ways in which qualitative data could be gathered.

1. **Using photographs as discussion starters:** Using photos taken during activities and participants reflecting on their meaning can encourage discussion and provide deeper insights than questions alone, allowing individuals to comment on specific aspects of their experience.
2. **Group discussions:** Group discussions save time by reducing the need for one-on-one interviews. Using an object to signal turns in speaking can ensure everyone has a chance to share their thoughts.
3. **Using post it notes or large pieces of paper:** At a programme's end, participants could share thoughts on post-it notes or cards for a board or collection box, offering a quick, less formal alternative to traditional evaluations.
4. **Filming participant discussion:** Some participants may enjoy being filmed discussing their programme experiences, and this can inform funders and potential participants about programme benefits. Some participants described having taken part in such films and had found the process rewarding.

Participants agreed that regardless of which method is used, gaining informed consent is essential. This means ensuring programme participants agree to share their stories, understand how the information will be used, and are confident that anonymity will be maintained where possible (e.g., if a person is happy to be filmed, this will not be anonymous). However, participants should share only what they feel comfortable with, and options like speaking off-camera or anonymising names/locations should be offered. While anonymised feedback can still reveal identities to those familiar with the details, this is less concerning if shared only with funders. Participants must understand potential onward sharing of content (e.g., on social media/by other people not related to the programme). This may not be an issue for some participants as they may welcome the opportunity to share their story. However, this should be clearly discussed and explored.

Summary and key tips for qualitative methods

- Informal qualitative methods where staff/volunteers capture key phrases, quotes, or themes from participant conversations may be preferable to more formal interviews.
- Building trust with programme participants, and emphasising how feedback can help improve the programme, can help encourage open and honest discussion.
- As with all forms of evaluation, it is important to gain consent. This should involve being clear about how and where the information will be used, who it will be shared with, and how individual anonymity will be protected.

Creative and participatory methods

Creative and participatory methods offer alternatives to traditional evaluations like questionnaires and interviews. They involve collaboration, with participants using creative approaches to capture programme impacts. Based on our literature review and interviews, examples include:

Journalling

Encouraging participants to document their experiences in writing, audio, or video allows for reflection and participant-led storytelling in a less restrictive way. Literacy and/or confidence using technology should be considered.

Arts and crafts

This could involve crafts/art from programme activities, potentially paired with participant quotes about what the art means to them and their enjoyment of the process. It might also include reflective art sessions or written, spoken, or musical expressions.

Films and photography

Participants may be interested in creating a vlog or photo reel outlining their experiences and the meaning attached to taking part.

The importance of being 'participatory'

Creative evaluations must be participatory, allowing participants to decide how to represent the programme's impacts. It is important to consider that participants may feel inclined to agree with staff/volunteer suggestions and ideas, so careful consent processes must be followed. Ongoing discussion about what participants feel comfortable doing is essential. Some people may not want to be involved in certain evaluation methods, which could lead to feelings of exclusion. Therefore, alternative routes of contribution need to be presented, and staff/volunteers should work with all participants, in a manner they are comfortable with.

Perceived acceptability and feasibility of creative methods from the point of view of participants

Creative/participatory approaches were seen as feasible and appropriate for evaluation, offering an enjoyable, inclusive way to reduce the feeling of being assessed. They can usually be integrated easily into sessions, fostering ownership and creative expression. However, these methods need planning to ensure relevance and focus. Some participants preferred privacy during activities like journalling, or were uncomfortable with certain artistic activities, highlighting the need for diverse options. Gentle encouragement, staff/volunteer involvement, and explaining benefits (e.g., keeping outputs as reminders of the programme) can boost participation.

Interview participants also noted that there can be additional challenges with some forms of creative methods which require the use of technology (such as taking videos or photographs). Interviewees noted that there should be clear boundaries around technology. For example, explaining that photography should only take place during a structured activity such as taking photographs of nature. For videos, it was suggested that individuals should only take videos either during set activities or at the end of each session during group/individual reflection. The time required to edit digital content for evaluation may also be a consideration.

Summary and key tips for creative methods

- Consent is paramount, particularly for those being filmed. This is not a one-off process and should be continually checked.
- Some people may not enjoy creative methods and may feel apprehensive. Staff/volunteers should work sensitively with participants' likes/dislikes and allow participants to lead discussions about what makes sense for them.
- Providing prompts for journalling can be a useful means of encouraging reflection, helping individuals to get over the feeling of having a blank page. Suggested prompts include: what am I noticing in nature?; what am I noticing in myself?; what is this teaching me?; and how can I apply what I am learning to my recovery/wellbeing?

Staff/volunteer observation of outcomes

Staff and volunteer observations could be formal or informal. Formal methods include written records or reports about sessions/participants, using structured observation tools like scoring charts or questionnaires to evaluate session impacts. Informal methods could involve capturing significant incidents and stories, such as notable progress in recovery or wellbeing.

Relying heavily on staff observations can lead to criticisms of bias and lack of impartiality. Funders may perceive staff as having an interest in presenting a positive picture of the programme. Additionally, definitions of 'success' can be subjective, and staff should avoid imposing their own ideas onto participants. Careful consideration of what the observation focus is should occur before starting observations. Despite these limitations, staff observations can supplement data from other methods. Observations from referrers or key workers, rather than programme staff, could help reduce positive bias.

Perceived acceptability and feasibility of staff/volunteer observation from the point of view of participants

Staff/volunteer observation was generally seen as feasible and valuable, particularly as a supplement to other methods. Interviewees noted that staff are well-placed to identify individual progress and benefits, and to provide motivation through goal-focused feedback. Some staff/volunteers discussed using feedback reports for references/evidence of progress for employment, social work, or criminal justice services. Key areas of focus for observations include: engagement and sociability; improvements in body language; changes in presentation and self-care; significant events like volunteering or joining community groups; and increased confidence.

Interviewees noted risks of unconscious bias, with staff potentially exaggerating benefits. Collaborative reflection with participants can reduce this risk as well as empower participants in evaluation. Staff/volunteers also discussed the best ways to approach observations during evaluation. The mentioned recording observations frequently, such as at the end of each session, ensures a more structured process and reduces reliance on memory. However, this could require significant time and commitment.

Summary and key tips for staff/volunteer observation

- Where appropriate, discuss observations with participants to highlight their progress and aid motivation.
- Combine with other evaluation methods to reduce perceptions of relying on potentially biased reflection.

Visits from funders/referrers

Encouraging funders, commissioners, and/or referrers to visit programmes may be an important means of demonstrating how programmes work and their impact. Where visits are not feasible due to location or time constraints, providing videos/a short film of the programme may also enable a better understanding of how the programme works.

Briefing summary and key considerations for evaluation

1. Think about the type and level of evidence required, the time and resources available, and the needs/preferences of participants when designing an evaluation.
2. Using only one evaluation method is unlikely to suit everyone, so providing participants with different options will likely be important.
3. Clearly explaining the need for evaluation and asking for participant input from an early stage can better ensure buy-in, reduce anxieties, and make the process more rewarding and meaningful for participants.
4. Clearly explaining how information will be used, by whom, and where it will be shared is essential when seeking informed consent.
5. Where possible, embedding outcome measures into sessions/activities can reduce the time investment required by staff/volunteers and participants, and make evaluation feel less formal.
6. Organisations should also discuss what they will do with the data once they have it. How will they analyse, store, process and share it, and with whom? Who will be doing this? All organisations must ensure UK GDPR requirements are met.

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