

Long term unemployment, insecure or unsustainable unemployment in TCV Hollybush volunteers

TCV Hollybush is a Conservation Centre based in Kirkstall, Leeds. The different projects run a range of practical outdoor activities in and around the Leeds area.

One of these projects is the Green Gym project that runs outdoor activities for health and wellbeing on sites across Leeds.

Through the support of EN:Able we investigated how these sessions help people develop their skills as well as building confidence, fitness and wellbeing.

Our volunteers reported:

**51% live
in 0-20%
IMD areas**

**30% are
unemployed**

**17% have
no qualification**

**45% volunteer
to learn new
skills &
experience**

Data collected through TCV Hollybush Green Gym Equality and Diversity data and Welfare Information.

In our day to day work, we encounter multiple reports of the challenges that our volunteers face when attempting attain and sustain adequate employment. For those seeking work, it is often reported as a significant point of stress in their daily lives.

Many of our volunteers report repeat rejections from job applications and infrequent interviews.

We looked further into the circumstances surrounding these anecdotal reports.

The experiences were complex and often multifaceted. We identified a selection of running themes in the employability challenges which many of our volunteers face.

This report is based on in depth conversations with 25 participants in the TCV Hollybush Green Gym project.

What our volunteers told us

Volunteers often face a combination of additional challenges when attempting to enter the job market. The outcomes often overlap, though some were unique to certain sets of circumstance.

We attempted to categorise the additional barriers that these sets of circumstance created.



Application format inaccessible.
eg. online or written

Requirements excluding people from trades.
eg. CSCS card

Complexity of job search platforms.
Not knowing where to go.

Formats that do not meet access needs.

Stigma excluding people from jobs they would be able to fulfil.

Gaps in employment. Sometimes lengthy or multiple occurrences.

Fluctuating health and ability to carry out roles and applications.

Inability to return to the roles they are qualified for due to ill health or injury.

Difficulties advocating for themselves in job application or work settings.

Difficulty accessing support services and advice.

Reduced capacity to carry out full time or high pressure roles.

Inadequate level of diagnosis for long term health conditions.

Many of our volunteer report getting stuck in a cyclical pattern. Many face multiple rejections or multiple bouts of unemployment. This can lead to feelings of hopelessness and a lack of direction.

"I can only work part time or the pain get's too bad."

"A lot of the job descriptions are intimidating."

"The painkillers I have to take after a shift knock me out for a whole day."

Loss in confidence from repeated set backs or time away.

Taking jobs that exacerbate health problems.

Having to take unsuitable and unsustainable roles

Fear of medical relapse in high pressure situations.

Feeling behind the times or under qualified.

Fear of returning to work that caused ill health.

"The job was moving stuff around. I just couldn't do that."

"There isn't another job I could do."

"It's cheaper to stay on benefits. I can't afford to get a job. I can't work full time."

With multidimensional challenges, novel and nuanced approaches are required to help get viable employment.

Many have felt let down by previous experiences on training courses or job seeking, stuck in a cycle of underachievement and are unsure of how to progress, feeling further and further left behind.

"Young people just starting out have it different. I was coming out of a job having to start again."

"Everywhere wants experience. There needs to be a way to give you time to volunteer and learn."

Many of the criteria of jobs offered to those unable to return to their trade are not compatible with the skill sets of those being asked to apply for the roles.

"I couldn't sit down at a computer all day."

"There was a 3 hours interview! Sod that."

Often long term job seekers have been sent on compulsory courses through the Job Centre, to learn new skills to help them in to employment. These courses often follow a set structure that does not match with the individual attendee's needs.

"A lot of courses you go on they just use you to make money. It devalues it."

"It just felt like a box ticking exercise."

And this is where Hollybush comes in!

About Hollybush

Hollybush Conservation Centre runs a wide selection of conservation based activities for adults across Leeds. As well as our base at Kirkstall, we also run groups out in the community to make our activities as accessible as we can.

As well as our Green Gym project, we run:

Short courses in woodwork, gardening, willow weaving, natural craft, conservation skills and more;

The Hollybush Project for adults with learning disabilities;

Hollyvols, a group for full days of practical conservation activities;

An over 50s project, The Great Outdoors through Leeds Older People's Forum and Time To Shine;

A weekly Wood Squad, making things out of reclaimed timber;

A community cafe and shop;

And many more pop up activities and events throughout the year.

None of this is possible without our volunteers

**Volunteer
Officers**

**Key
Volunteers**

**Participants
&
Learners**

Volunteer categories at TCV Hollybush

The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) offers graduated volunteer opportunities. Each category offers a different level of responsibility to the volunteer in the role.

Each of the roles offers opportunities for volunteers to build their skills, develop their confidence, and can help those taking part to improve their employment opportunities.

TCV's volunteer roles offer different levels of responsibility and time commitment, creating appealing and accessible opportunities for the widest range of people.

**"I didn't really know what to do
next.
Just by chance I ended up here."**

**"Sometimes you just have to
reinvent yourself."**

Volunteer Officers

- Traineeship aimed to build employability skills.
- Volunteers take on leadership roles in sessions run by TCV.
- 3 - 5 days a week volunteer time.
- 6 month minimum time commitment.

- Volunteer Officers receive an extensive training package to enable them to carry out their role.
- Volunteer Officers receive on the job training in how to lead groups, plan projects and carry out practical conservation activities.

Key Volunteers

- Volunteer role taking on more responsibility in the sessions that they attend.
- Usually 1 or 2 sessions a week volunteer time.
- No minimum time commitment expectation.

- Key Volunteers receive some additional training, as is required in the role that they assist with.
- Key volunteers gain experience in the role that they take additional responsibility in.
- The scale of this role varies .

Participants & Learners

- Participants attend our sessions free of charge. *
- Participants can attend our session short, or long term without compulsory attendance. **
- Participants will always be supported by a trained leader.

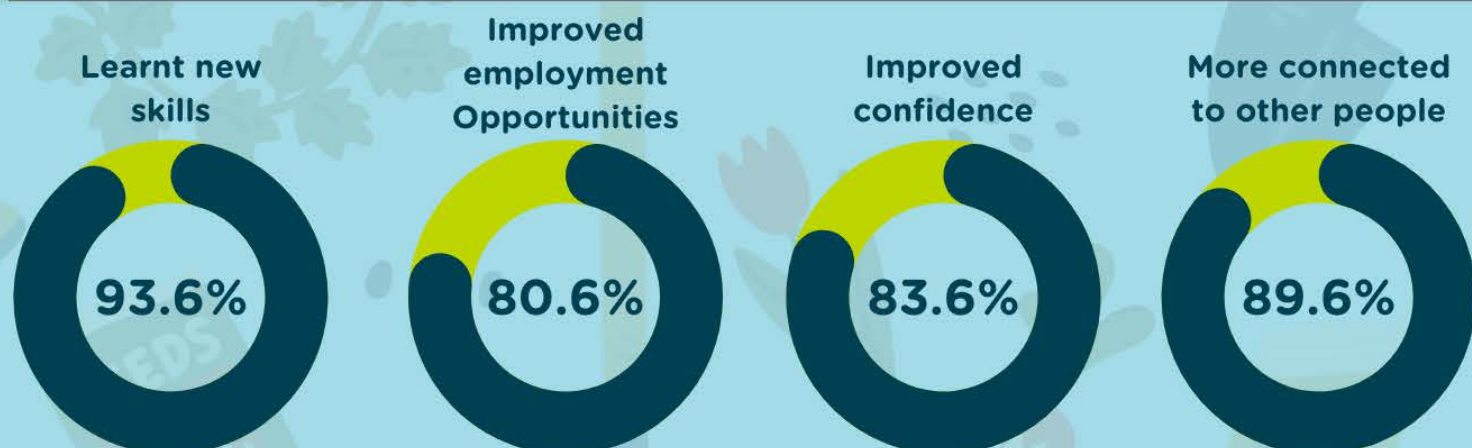
- Participants gain the skills carried out in the sessions.
- Participants will benefit from the guidance of trained leaders.
- Participants are able to learn at their own pace.
- Learners will receive a certificate to evidence the course that they have attended.

A break down of the requirements expected of and training package offered to the different categories of volunteer role with TCV Hollybush

"It gave me something I could put on as a reference."

"I feel more confident in my abilities to try and learn new things."

Responses to our 2021 Impact Survey demonstrate the overwhelming positive experience that our attendees report in terms of their skills, confidence and employability:



Data collected via the TCV Impact Survey for TCV Hollybush

*** - Except in the instance of Adult Short Courses where the learner's income exceeds the low income threshold

*** - Except in the instance of Adult Short Courses which have a minimum attendance requirement of 75%

TCV Hollybush has a long term track record of offering improved employability prospects for the volunteers that we work with. The skills and confidence that our volunteers gain attending our sessions puts them in a much stronger position in the job market.

However, there are ways that we identified that could help those that we work with to develop their skills further.

Financial support to take part in traineeship roles. The time commitment of our Volunteer Officer roles make them challenging alongside working.

Support for volunteers to identify their transferable skills gained through TCV Hollybush, and in how to present them in job searches.

Support volunteers in part time roles, or roles unsustainable due to health conditions, to gain more appropriate employment.

To help volunteers with chronic health conditions or disabilities currently in the job seeker market to access appropriate support and advocacy.

To offer non-classroom based support for volunteers whose negative experiences with learning environments discourage them from committing to a 12 week course.

Support for adults over 25 who are changing career, or trying to re-enter the job market, similar to that available for people aged 18-25.

Barriers reported by our volunteers to them taking part in additional training opportunities.

Conclusions

To conclude, TCV Hollybush works with a wide range of participants, many of who feel disadvantaged in the job seeker market and/or limited in their employment choices. Through an integrated approach Hollybush seeks to work with volunteers, to increase their confidence, learn better how to utilise their transferable skills and participate in activities that they can use to enhance their future employment chances. Feedback from participants illustrates how taking part in regular volunteering activity reduces feelings of social isolation and increases feelings of self-worth and resilience.

Through its informal setting, the non-classroom based activity and supportive environment, TCV Hollybush allows volunteers to develop their skills and confidence at their own pace. This model helps those who have felt previously let down by systems to participate on their own terms.

With the support of partner organisations, TCV is in a strong position to offer those that we work with a platform to develop their skills and successfully gain employment.

With the support of EN:Able we will be able to progress with this work to directly support our volunteers towards these aims.