



1st February 2019

Evaluation of the Vale community hospital allotments scheme

Foreword

This evaluation was commissioned by the steering group for the allotments at the Vale Community hospital, an innovative scheme, using unused hospital land to provide community and on prescription allotments. The scheme was supported initially by Gloucester Care Services charitable funds, Barnwood Trust, Dursley Town council and the Summerfield Charitable Trust with support also from the Vale Hospital League of friends.

The evaluation was carried out by Amanda Pyne who is a qualified Occupational Therapist and also a Horticultural therapist.

The highlight of the report is the excellent uptake of the allotment beds (of the 41 beds 37 were taken and two were being prescribed that week) and the fact that 100% of those who completed the evaluation enjoyed growing and eating their own produce and that 55% felt that their diet had improved. I am proud to be writing this foreword on the very day that the EAT-Lancet commission released its major report on the potential of food systems to nurture human health and support environmental sustainability. It was also encouraging that so many allotment holders reported that it was a good place for social participation and that they felt they belonged to a local community group and felt happy and relaxed during their time there.

Whilst the number of beds currently taken by a social prescription is low, this hides a more encouraging picture. A number of allotment holders declined to take up a "prescription" and instead have paid directly for their allotment as a way of supporting the scheme. In addition, there are a number of patients who initially were referred and who, after their year of using the allotment as a social prescription, have now become "ordinary" allotment holders. This progression is extremely encouraging. Lastly two participants who were referred by health care professionals have since graduated to a full size allotment that is provided by Dursley Town council. This graduation is to be particularly commended. However more does need to be done to encourage GP referral.

The future looks bright for this innovative scheme. 10 more raised beds are currently being built by current allotment holders. The staff at the hospital have said how they really appreciate the hospital grounds and allotment community. As part of the new stroke rehabilitation unit, The Vale will be able to provide horticultural therapy to inpatients. Macmillan have "purchased" their first bed and the funding model of specific organisation purchasing allotments for specific health needs is exciting as well.

This has all been made possible by the enthusiastic work of our dedicated steering committee, without which none of this would have taken place.

Dr Simon Opher MBE

Steering Committee: Dr Simon Opher MBE, Amanda Godber, Lesley Greene, Mike Burdge



Evaluation of the Vale Community Hospital Allotments Project, Dursley, Gloucestershire

Amanda Pyne BSc (Hons)
ajpyne@hotmail.co.uk

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Key Findings	3
Recommendations.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Findings	6
Question 1.....	6
Question 2.....	7
Question 3.....	8
Question 4.....	9
Question 5.....	9
Question 6.....	10
Question 7.....	10
Question 8.....	11
Question 9.....	12
Question 10.....	13
Question 11.....	14
Question 12.....	15
Question 13.....	16
Question 14.....	16
Question 15.....	17
Question 16.....	17
Additional Responses.....	18
Discussion.....	18
Funders of the Vale Allotments Project.....	21

Executive Summary

Key Findings

- A high percentage of allotment holders found out about the allotments project through other means than their GP with only 1 having found out about the allotments through their GP. This may also be due to the fact that at the time of carrying out the questionnaire the project was not known to the Independence Trust who are the new commissioning organisation for Social Prescribing. This has now been rectified and The Vale allotments information is now on their website.
- Daytime is the preferred time for allotment holders to visit their allotments, however evening and weekends are also well attended and there is a fairly even split regarding how many times a week they attend.
- A high proportion of the allotment holders feel a sense of belonging to a local community group whilst at the Vale allotments and report feeling much happier and relaxed whilst attending to their allotments.
- A very high percentage of the allotment holders report finding the allotment's a good place for social participation with their fellow allotment holders and that they enjoy meeting and talking to the other allotment holders whilst sharing ideas and information with each other.
- Lower than expected, 8 (40%) of allotment holders reported that their physical health had improved whilst attending to their allotments and only one reported that the amount of time they spend visiting their GP surgery has reduced since attending the allotments.
- There is a 50/50 split between allotment holders having attended a workshop at the allotment and having found it helpful and enjoyable, however a high percentage reported that they would like to attend more workshops and groups. This is despite the fact that previous attempts at running workshops and groups have not always been well attended.
- Four allotment holders (20%) have reported that they felt they would benefit from one to one support, although this is a relatively low percentage it does however suggest that there is a need, despite support being offered to them during an initial meeting.
- All the 20 (100%) allotment holders enjoy growing and eating their own produce from their allotments and 11 (55%) feel that their diet has improved as a result of it.
- 12 (60%) of allotment holders report that they felt the sculpture at the allotments adds to their appreciation of the space by giving it a nice ambience and a locally recognisable identity.

Recommendations

I recommend that further input is needed to increase awareness of the allotments especially with GPs and other Health Professionals in order to enable everyone to have the opportunity to participate within the Vale Allotment project. This may be achieved through presenting the findings of this Evaluation directly to the Health Professionals through a presentation or making copies of the Evaluation paperwork available for them to read.

There is also a need indicated for additional group work and one to one support provision to be made available to the Vale Allotment project. Although the one to one support indicated is only for a small proportion of the allotment holders at present as measures are already in place to offer such support during the initial start process. To address this need, perhaps letters or emails can be sent to all allotment holders and a notice can be put up at the allotments with contact information made available for the allotment holders who feel that they would like a follow up meeting to discuss their changing needs for support. Plus provision made to implement a process which enables a follow up review of allotment holders needs on a six month or yearly process or monthly for those on Social Prescription. As need may increase in the future if more Social Prescription clients are offered allotment plots by their health professionals and they require additional support and input whilst working on their allotments due to their physical or mental health difficulties changing.

If one to one work is requested it should be tailored to meet the individual need of the allotment holder with an initial assessment interview being carried out first to help identify the allotment holder's difficulties and then a discussion to determine how to achieve their goal safely and appropriately to enable them to work on their allotment and follow up appointments to monitor their progress. Also the groups offered need to continue to promote the good sense of community cohesion and wellbeing that the allotment holders have strongly indicated that they feel whilst at the Vale allotments site. I am aware that there are already a number of appropriate workshops being ran at the site, which are not always well attended therefore provision has been made for a soup workshop and compost workshop to be ran in 2019 due to allotment holder's requests. I would recommend that the project staff continue to ask allotment holders for ideas regarding what workshops they would like to see offered.

The sense of community could be further promoted and encouraged by increasing the number of social events held at the allotments for instance summer/autumn fetes, plant sales, coffee mornings, produce swaps and BBQ's. It may be beneficial to try and link more with the hospital and encourage staff to bring their clients out into the allotments to enjoy the therapeutic benefits of the allotments and perhaps participate in some of the workshops or social events.

All the groups and social events need to continue being advertised appropriately to make them accessible to all. Plus Health Professionals and GPs in the Vale Hospital kept informed by letting them know when events are being held, which would in turn enable them to promote these events and groups to their clients.

Furthermore this Evaluation has been carried out with a small group of participants as this is a relatively small project and only 20 out of the 31 questionnaires sent out were received back, however this is a very good response rate. Therefore it would be beneficial to carry it out again if and when the group becomes larger and to carry out a revaluation in the future to see if any of the statistics have changed and if the improvements recommended have been beneficial or not.

Introduction

The Vale Community Hospital Allotments in Dursley, Gloucestershire was completed in April 2016, when the unused ground at the front of the hospital was developed with 41 raised bed allotments and made available for rent through a social prescription referral scheme and also made available to local individuals and groups interested in growing their own fruit and vegetables as there was a high waiting list for existing local allotments. An orchard was also planted and there is a garden surrounding the carpark.

The garden and allotment development was planned by Amanda Godber of Down to Earth Stroud for three years, alongside local GP Dr Simon Opher.



The Launch on 15th April 2016.

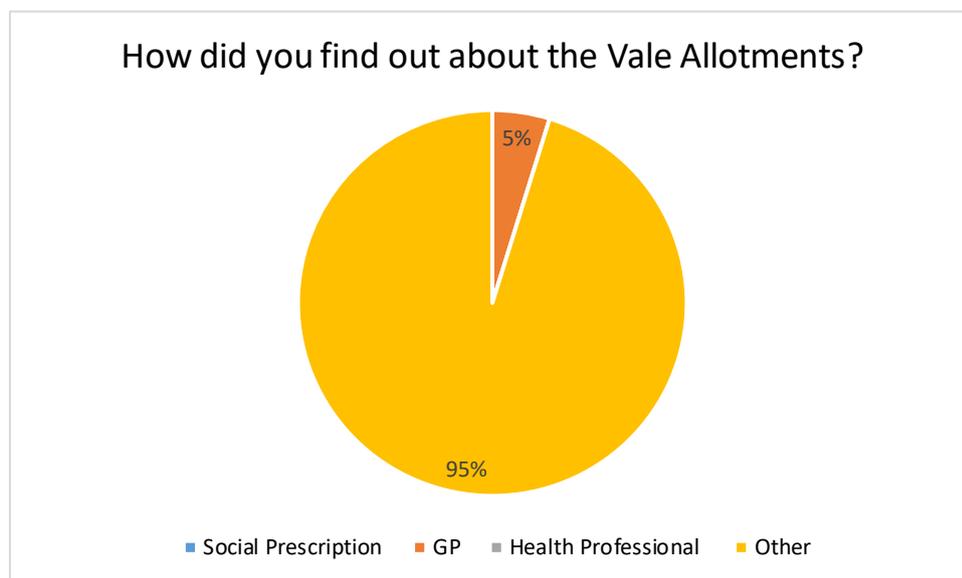
This Evaluation has been commissioned by Down to Earth Stroud in order to satisfy the requirements of their funders and to measure the outcomes of the project and look at ways to develop it in the future.

In order to carry out this Evaluation a questionnaire was produced with 16 questions which aimed to address the main funders objectives and outcome requirements. Also a number of the questions were developed in joint collaboration with Amanda Godber of Down to Earth and Lesley Greene of the Vale Community Hospital Steering Group.

The questionnaire was posted out to the 31 allotment holders by Down to Earth with a return stamp addressed envelope and 20 replies were received back. The allotment holders were invited to complete the questionnaire by placing an X into the relevant space which best described their experience, however a number of the allotment holders placed more than one X in each section and therefore had multiple answers for some questions, this is reflected in the Findings and Discussion section. The unopened envelopes were sent to myself Amanda Pyne the researcher for evaluation and for the purpose of this Evaluation I have elected to refer to the allotment holders as respondents in the Findings and Discussion sections.

Findings

Question 1

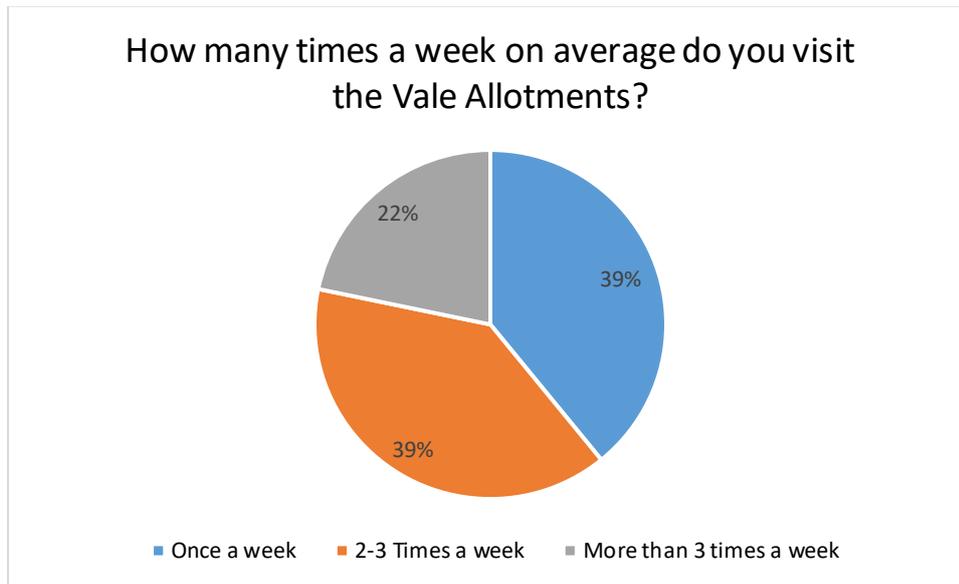


20 responses were received for this question and 19 respondents (95%) reported that they found out about the allotments through other means and 1 respondent (5%) through their GP.

The respondents who chose 'other' were asked how exactly they found out about the allotments and 13 respondents entered their replies in the additional information box.

7 respondents reported that they lived locally, and found out about the allotments through word of mouth or local advertisements. 3 respondents reported they found out about the allotments through a poster on The Vale Hospital notice board. 2 respondents found out about the allotments because they are garden volunteers at The Vale Hospital garden and 1 via a mutual friend who volunteers.

Question 2

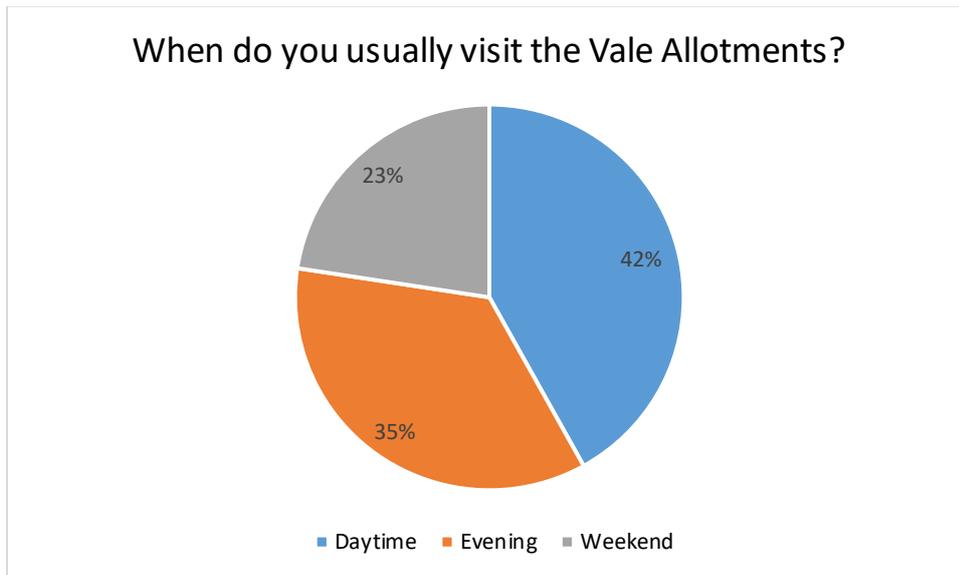


20 responses were received for this question with 3 respondents putting an X in two of the boxes and reporting that they attend depending on the time of year. 1 respondent placed an X in the once a week box and reported that they attended "*less than once a week due to heavy work commitments this year*", therefore I have included it in the data for once a week.

The results show 9 respondents (39%) reported attending once a week and 9 respondents (39%) 2 to 3 times a week, with 5 respondents (22%) attending more than 3 times a week.

The data suggests that there is a fairly even split between when respondents visited their allotments as 9 (39%) attended once a week and 2-3 times a week with 5 (22%) more than 3 times a week.

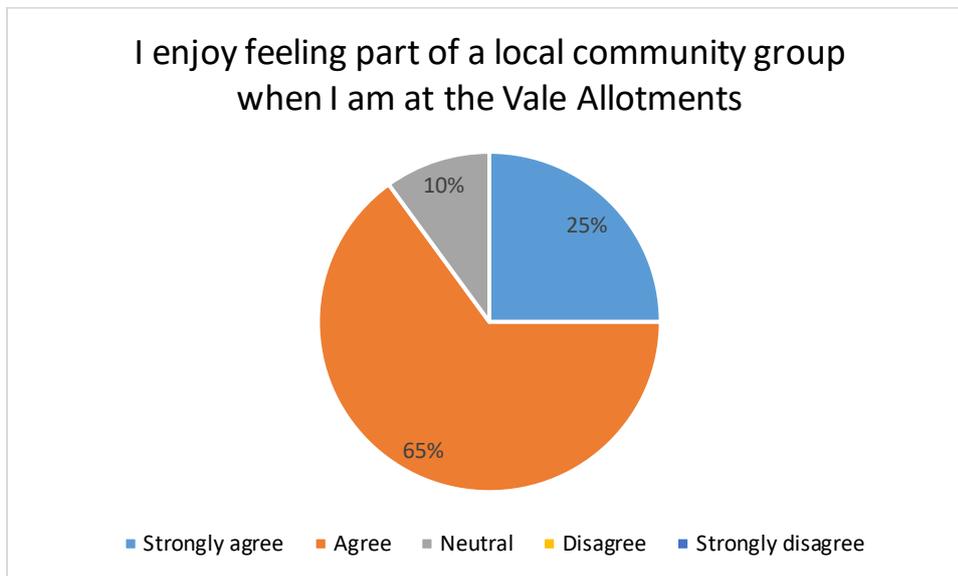
Question 3



Although all 20 respondents replied to this question 9 of the respondents put an X in either all three boxes or two of the boxes, therefore there were a total of 31 responses. I have therefore included all 31 responses into the data. This indicates that the time of day they attended to their allotment varied from daytime to evening and weekend, therefore these respondents did not appear to have a regular time to visit.

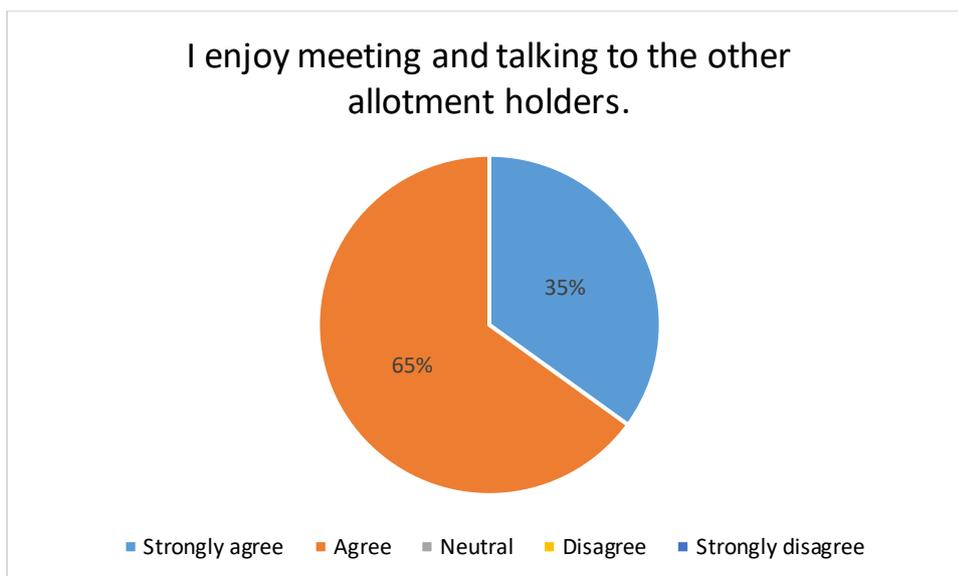
The results show 13 respondents (42%) usually visited their allotments during the daytime. 11 respondents (35%) usually visited their allotments during the evening and 7 respondents (23%) usually visited their allotments during the weekend.

Question 4



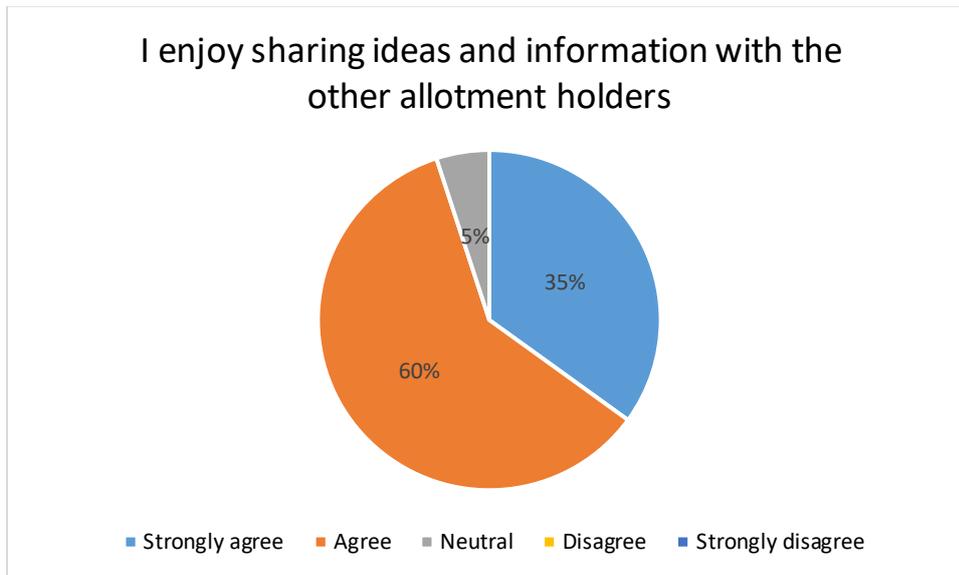
20 responses were received for this question with 18 respondents (90%) reporting that they either agree or strongly agree that they enjoy feeling part of a local community group when attending to their allotments with only 2 respondents (10%) reporting a neutral response.

Question 5



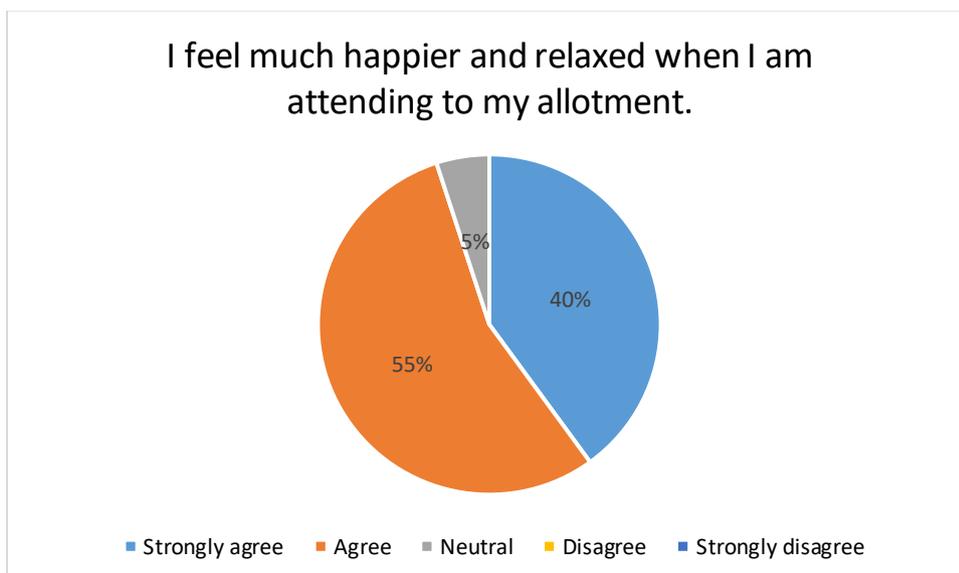
20 responses were received for this question with all 20 respondents (100%) reporting that they either agree or strongly agree that they enjoy meeting and talking to the other allotment holders.

Question 6



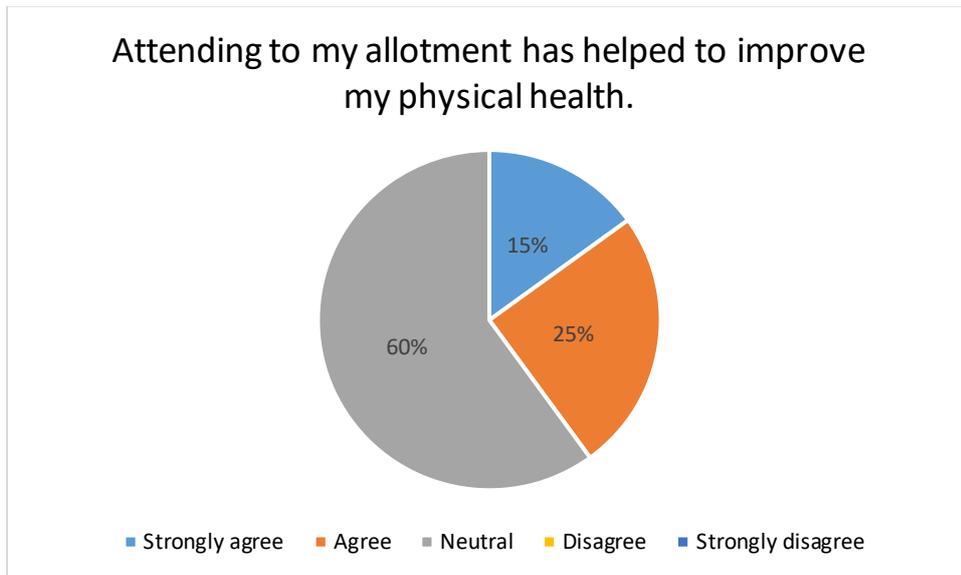
20 responses were received for this question with 19 of the respondents (95%) reporting that they either agree or strongly agree that they enjoy sharing ideas and information with the other allotment holders and 1 respondent (5%) reporting a neutral response to the question.

Question 7



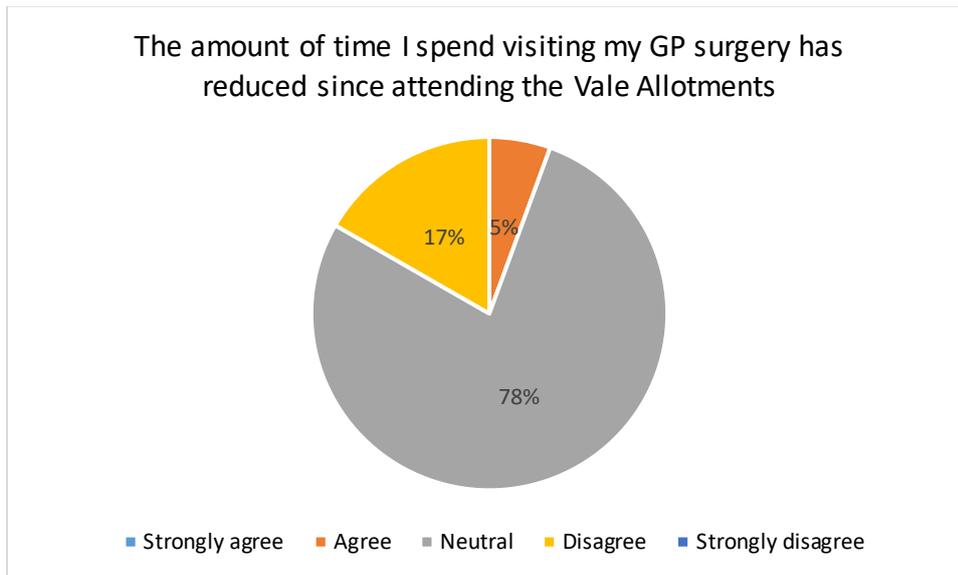
20 responses were received for this question with 19 of the respondents (95%) reporting that they either agree or strongly agree that they feel much happier and relaxed when they are attending to their allotments and 1 respondent (5%) reported a neutral response to the question.

Question 8



20 responses were received for this question with 12 respondents (60%) reporting a neutral response to the question that attending to their allotment is helping to improve their physical health. 8 respondents (40%) reported that they either agree or strongly agree that attending to their allotment at the Vale has helped to improve their physical health.

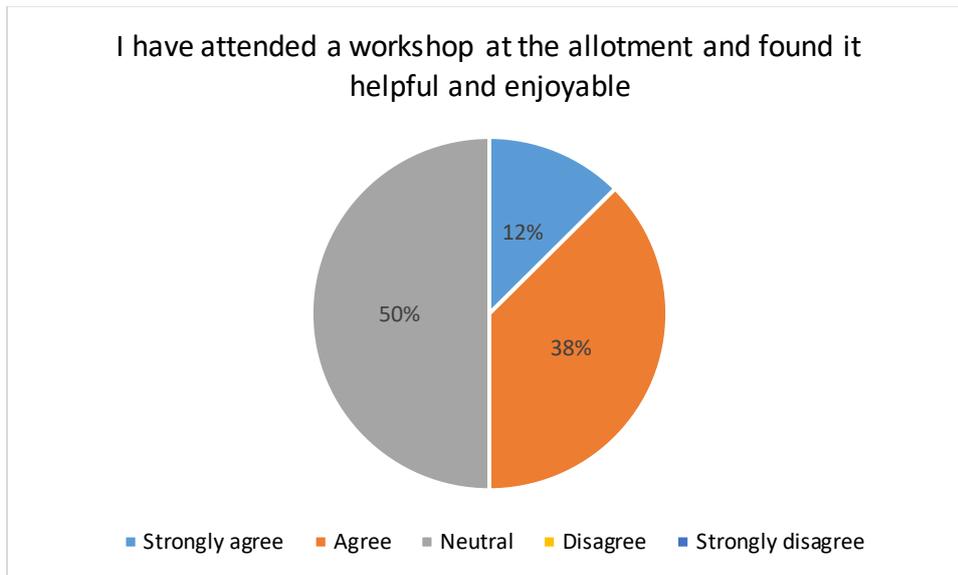
Question 9



18 responses were received for this question with two respondents writing not applicable. 14 respondents (78%) reported a neutral response to the question that the amount of time spent visiting their GP had reduced since attending the Vale Allotments. 3 respondents (17%) disagree that the amount of time they spend visiting their GP surgery has reduced since attending the Vale Allotments.

1 respondent (5%) agrees that the amount of time they spend visiting their GP surgery has reduced since attending the Vale allotments, this respondent has written that *“the Vale allotments helps you to relax, carry out physical activity and meet people, which is good for mental health”*.

Question 10

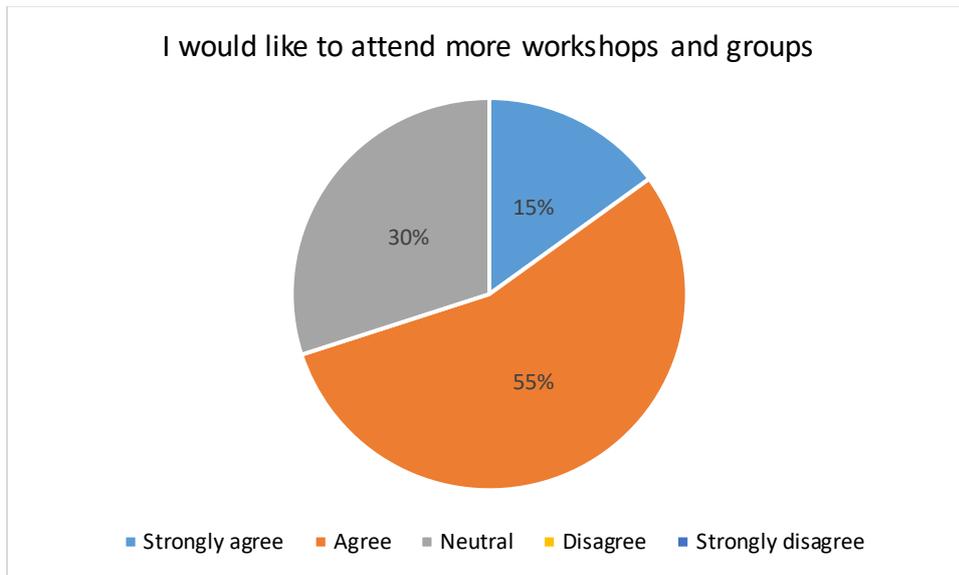


18 responses were received for this question with two respondents writing a comment instead of selecting an appropriate box, therefore I have not entered them into the data. There comments are: one respondent noted that they *"would not attend"* and another *"not attended a workshop yet. Not been informed of any, would like to attend a workshop"*.

8 respondents (50%) reported a neutral response to the question and one also wrote the comment *"Haven't yet"*. 8 respondents (50%) reported that they either agree or strongly agree that they have attended a workshop at the allotment and found it helpful and enjoyable.

The percentages show a 50/50 split between responders having attended a workshop at the allotment and having found it helpful and enjoyable or having a neutral response to the question. However 1 respondent who reported neutral to the question did comment *"haven't yet"* and another who did not select an appropriate box and therefore was not entered into the data wrote *"[].... would like to attend a workshop"*. Therefore if we take these two into account it may suggest that they would like to attend one.

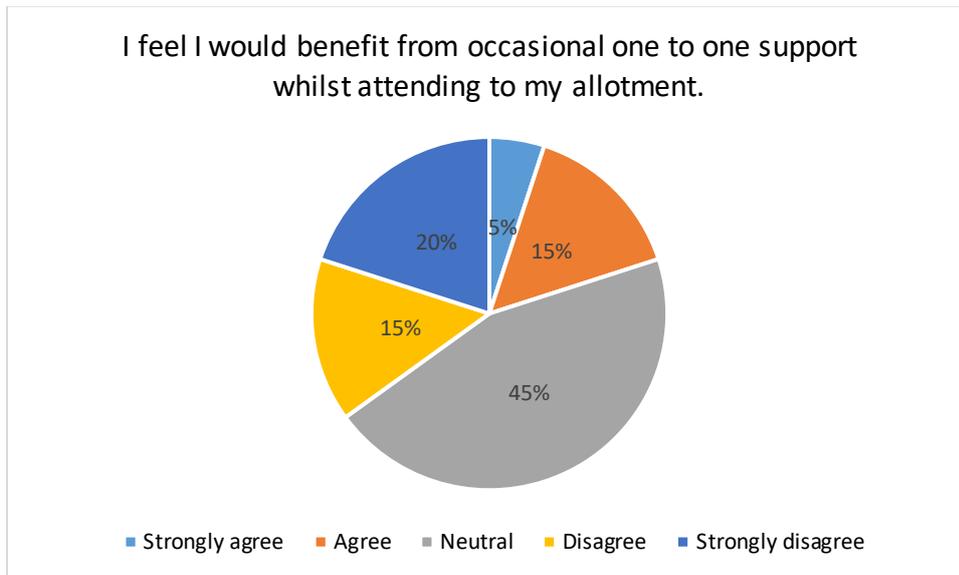
Question 11



20 responses were received for this question with 17 respondents (70%) reporting they agree or strongly agree that they would like to attend more workshops and groups and one respondent reported that *"Having dates well in advance helps"*. 6 respondents (30%) reported neutral to the question.

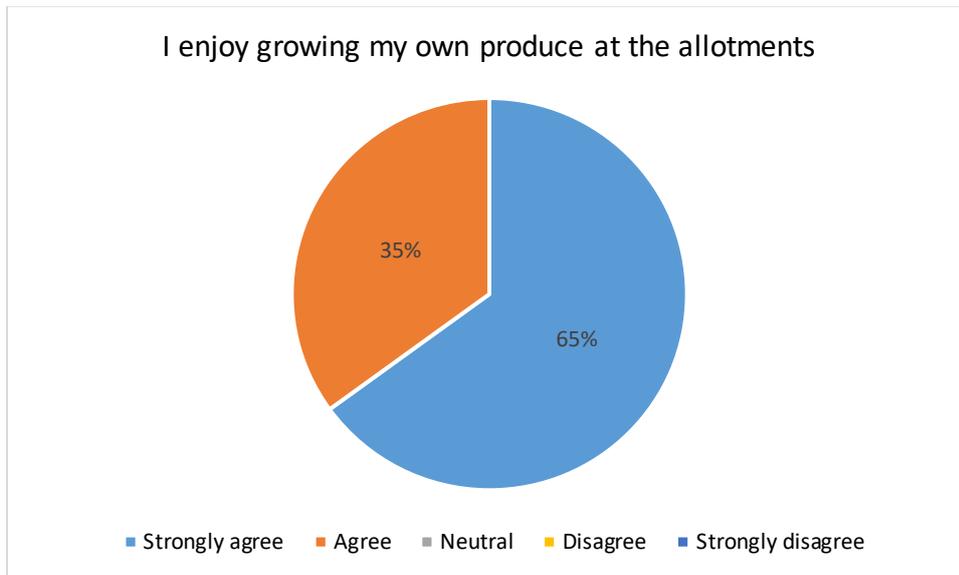
The data strongly suggests that a high proportion of respondents (70%) would like to attend more workshops and groups.

Question 12



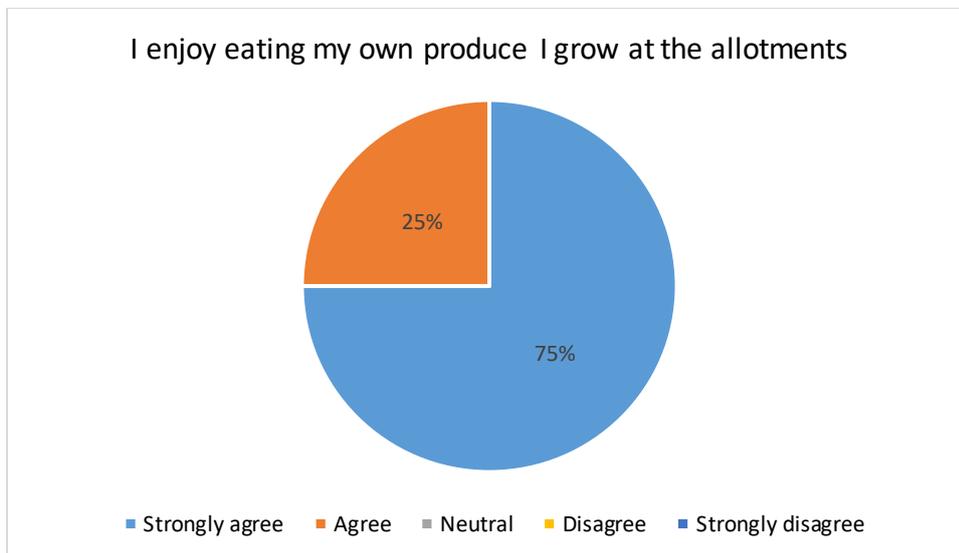
20 responses were received for this question with 9 respondents (45%) reporting a neutral response to the question. 7 respondents (35%) reported either a disagree or strongly disagree response to the question. 4 respondents (20%) reported that they either agree or strongly agree that they felt they would benefit from occasional one to one support whilst attending to their allotment, and one respondent wrote they *"would value one to one support occasionally if available"*

Question 13



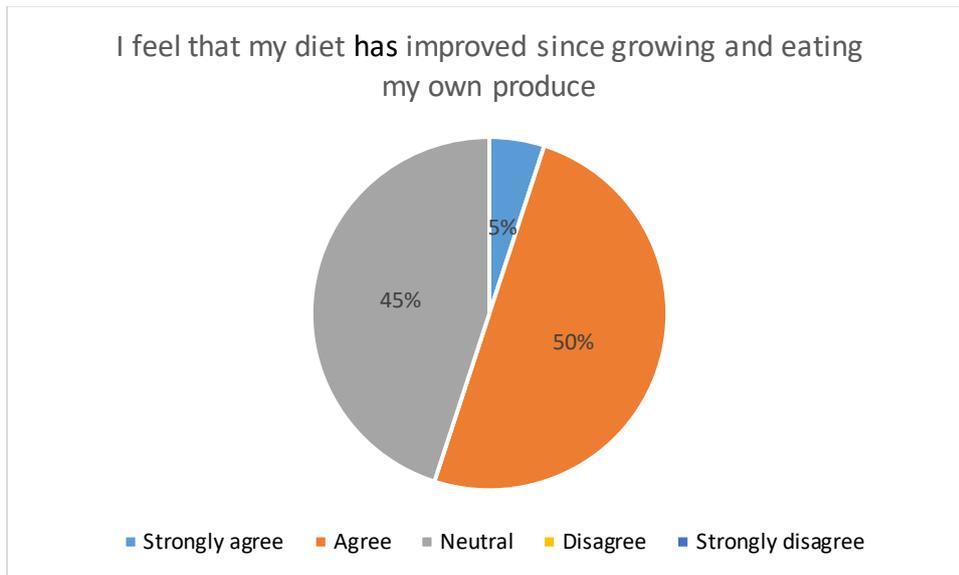
20 responses were received for this question with 20 respondents (100%) reporting that they agree or strongly agree that they enjoy growing their own produce at the allotment.

Question 14



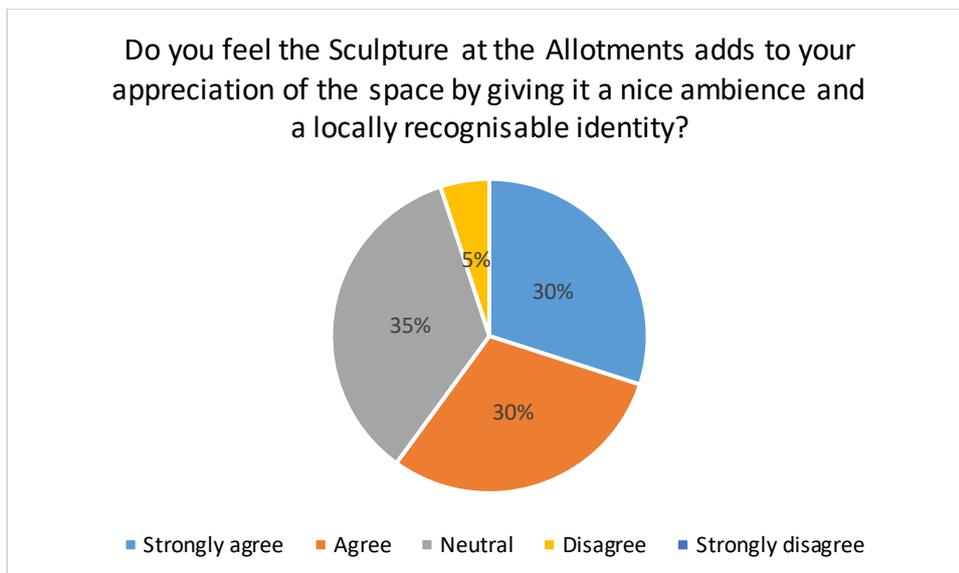
20 responses were received for this question with 20 respondents (100%) reporting that they agree or strongly agree that they enjoy eating their own produce they grow at the allotments.

Question 15



20 responses were received for this question with 11 respondents (55%) of respondents reporting that they agree or strongly agree that they feel that their diet has improved since growing and eating their own produce. 9 respondents (45%) reported a neutral response to the question.

Question 16



20 responses were received for this question with 12 respondents (60%) reporting that they either agree or strongly agree that the sculpture added to their appreciation of the space by giving it a nice

ambience and a locally recognisable identity. 7 respondents (35%) reported a neutral response to the question and 1 respondent disagreed.

Additional Responses

Other respondent's comments received on questionnaire in the additional information space which do not relate directly to the questions and therefore have not been counted in the data:

"I feel it would be fairer if the annual payment/rent were on a pro rata basis as people join at different times of the year"

"We hope to join in more activities next year when we should be more settled in our new home at (Sheltered Home). It is lovely to be in a big safe/flat space for people with wheelchairs etc. Thankyou Amanda"

"Summer get together of all allotment holders would be lovely. The green area be used for small summer, Christmas craft market in partnership with hospital"

Discussion

The data suggests that a high percentage of respondents found out about the allotments through other means with only one respondent through their GP. This may also be due to the fact that at the time of carrying out the questionnaire the project was not known to the Independence Trust who are the new commissioning organisation for Social Prescribing. This has now been rectified and The Vale allotments information is now on their website. However it is still important to continue promoting the project in order to increase awareness of the allotments with GPs and other Health Professionals to enable everyone to have the opportunity to participate within the Vale Allotment project.

The data also suggests that there is a fairly even split between when respondents visited their allotments as 9 (39%) attended once a week and 2-3 times a week with 5 (22%) more than 3 times a week. The results also show that there is a slightly higher percentage 13 (42%) of respondents who prefer to visit their allotment during the daytime hours whilst 11 (35%) during the evening and only 7 (23%) during the weekend. This information is important to take into account when planning any future group or one to one sessions in order to make it as accessible as possible to all the allotment holders.

There is also a clear indication that whilst attending to their allotments at the Vale, a high proportion of the allotment holders feel a sense of belonging to a local community group (question 4) with 18 of the respondents (95%) reporting that they felt much happier and relaxed whilst attending to their allotments. The data also strongly suggests that a very high percentage (with only 1 respondent reporting neutral to question 6) of the respondents find the allotment's a good place for social

participation with their fellow allotment holders as they reported that they enjoyed meeting and talking to the other allotment holders whilst sharing ideas and information with each other.

However only 8 (40%) of all respondents reported that attending to their allotments has helped to improve their physical health as 12 (60%) of respondents reported feeling neutral about the question. This is a surprise as it was hoped that a higher proportion of respondents would have felt the physical benefit of exercise whilst working their allotments. This may be due to the fact that a high proportion of the respondents perceive themselves to be physically fit already or at a physical fitness level which they are happy with. This is also correlated with question nine as only one respondent have reported that the amount of time they spend visiting their GP surgery has reduced since attending the Vale Allotments, this is another disappointing figure as it was hoped that a higher number would find a reduction in GP visits. However we do not know the medical history of the respondents as the information obtained on the questionnaire is anonymous, therefore the low number may be due to the fact that the majority of respondents do not visit their GP surgery regularly anyway. This percentage may change in the future if more Social Prescription clients are referred to the allotments by their Health Professional.

The evidence shows a 50/50 split between respondents having attended a workshop at the allotment and having found it helpful and enjoyable or having a neutral response to the question. However 1 respondent who reported neutral to the question did comment "*haven't yet*" and another who had not select an appropriate box and therefore was not entered into the data wrote "[]... *would like to attend a workshop*". Therefore if we take these two into account it would suggest that a higher percentage of respondents have enjoyed the current workshops and two others would like to attend a workshop. This would also back up the data collected from question 11 and the statement "*I would like to attend more workshops and groups*" as a high proportion of respondents (70%) agreed or strongly agreed to this statement. This is interesting as a number of workshops have been provided and advertised in the past but some have been poorly attended by the allotment holders. I am aware also that participants have been asked previously regarding the type of workshop they would like to attend and have requested a soup workshop and composting workshop and both are being planned for this year.

Although only four of the respondents reported in question 12 that they felt that they would benefit from occasional one to one support whilst attending to their allotments, this still needs to be addressed. This is despite support being offered during the initial start process when Amanda Godber meets with each allotment holder to show them around and discuss any additional support that they may require. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the needs of the respondent has changed since that initial meeting. This number may increase in the future if more Social Prescription clients are offered allotment plots and they too felt they would benefit from additional support and input whilst working on their allotments due to their physical or mental health difficulties. Therefore the evidence would strongly indicate that continuing to run additional workshops and groups and having occasional one to one follow up support would be beneficial to the Vale Allotments project and that a follow up meeting may be needed especially for Social Prescription clients in case there situation has changed.

The evidence also shows unanimously that all the 20 (100%) of respondents enjoyed growing and eating their own produce from their allotments and that 11 (55%) feel that their diet has improved as a result of it. Interestingly 9 (45%) report a neutral response with no respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing therefore this could suggest that all respondents feel that their diet has not become unhealthier as a result of eating their own produce.

Finally the data shows that 12 (60%) of the 20 respondents felt that the sculpture at the allotments added to their appreciation of the space and gave it a nice ambience and locally recognisable identity. With 7 (35%) giving a neutral response and only 1 respondent disagreeing.

Funders of the Vale Allotments Project

NHS
Gloucestershire
Clinical Commissioning Group

