



**COMMUNITY
FOREST TRUST**

**Measuring the social return from investment
in the Natural Health Services**



**Social
Investment
Business**

 **Natural Health
Service**

About Community Forest Trust

The Community Forest Trust is an environmental charity supporting community forestry in England. It exists to provide project support, generate funding and raise awareness of the Community Forests, enabling them to provide new opportunities for health, leisure, recreation and cultural activities whilst revitalising land, enhancing biodiversity, preparing for climate change and supporting education, healthy living and social and economic development. It supports specific forest projects mainly in the North West of England to open access to woodland areas that can be enjoyed by communities.

The charity focuses on transforming neglected and degraded sites, working with local people to strengthen links with communities and bringing nature to towns and cities. Natural Health Services form an integral part of Community Forest Trust in its agenda to tackle health inequalities with its range of interventions based in the local natural environment. This upstream approach offers a number of benefits including to commissioning bodies, potentially cutting long-term costs and infrastructural pressures.



Contents

About the Community Forest Trust	1
Executive summary	3-4
Foreword	5-6
SROI Explained	7-8
The Natural Health Service	9-10
What we want to achieve	11-12
Expected outcomes	13-14
The impact	15-16
Calculating the return	17-18
Learning and Recommendations	19-20
Appendix	21-22

About the authors

Cogent was formed in 2012 with the specific purpose of providing business advice services to organisations in England that are involved in the provision of health, social care and community focused services.

Cogent work with their clients to help them to understand the social impact that their interventions are responsible for and help them to embed suitable reporting systems. They also carry out full SROI evaluations and produce reports for distribution to lenders and commissioners.



Executive Summary

“I love getting out in the fresh air, enjoying the company of other people and feeling energised after the activity.”

Natural Health Service pilot participant



The Community Forest Trust is an environmental charity supporting community forestry. The Trust creates and promotes healthier, attractive places to live and work and is the prime contractor for Natural Health Services which offer an upstream approach to healthcare through the provision of health and well-being activities in green spaces, reducing demand for more costly healthcare further downstream.

This Social Return On Investment (SROI) analysis draws on an assessment of a Natural Health Services pilot delivered by The Community Forest Trust and its partners in order to establish a clear and evidenced theory of change.

Community Forest Trust want to build on the success of the Natural Health Service pilot by expanding the service to work with around 6,000 people a year. The majority of individuals who would use the scaled up service will be people who have a high risk of developing a future need for expensive health services.

Our findings show that the expanded Natural Health Service will achieve a return on investment where for every £1.00 invested in the project, £6.75 social return will be generated.

For every £1 invested the programme will deliver a social return of £6.75

£1

£6.75

Foreword

by Paul Nolan OBE

“Our aim is to see the Natural Health Service commissioned as part of a holistic approach to health care and improvement”

Paul Nolan OBE



Welcome and thank you for reading this independent report commissioned by the Community Forest Trust and the Social Investment Business (SIB) which explores the social benefits of the Natural Health Service.

Our aim is to see the Natural Health Service commissioned as part of a holistic approach to health care and improvement. Mindful of the pressures on NHS funding, we plan to achieve this by building up the evidence base for the efficacy and Social Return on Investment (SROI) of the service. This evidence base is steadily growing through joint work with Liverpool John Moores University and Liverpool University supported by the North West Coast Academic Health Science Network.

The SIB have recognised the need for investment in social ventures to enable them to demonstrate social impact and have therefore funded the Community Forest Trust to engage Cogent Ventures in undertaking an assessment of the SROI of The Natural Health Service.

We are grateful to the organisations who gave their time, knowledge and experience to help to formulate our SROI. The independent assessment, in depth interviews, thorough examination and evaluation of the data has produced what we think is a robust and compelling SROI for the Natural Health Service.

Combined with the evidence of efficacy, this SROI increases the opportunities for discussion with commissioners about the role of the natural environment in helping to address some of the most pressing health needs facing our society; now and in the decades to come.

We are always open to questions and questioning about our work. Equally we believe that partnership working, pooling ideas, knowledge and resources, really is the best way to deliver our Natural Health agenda. So whether you have a question, want to explore ways to work together, or would simply like to comment on this report, we would love to hear from you.

info@naturalhealthservice.org.uk

SROI explained

“Being outside, helping out on something worthwhile, meeting new people, and being active is what I really like.”

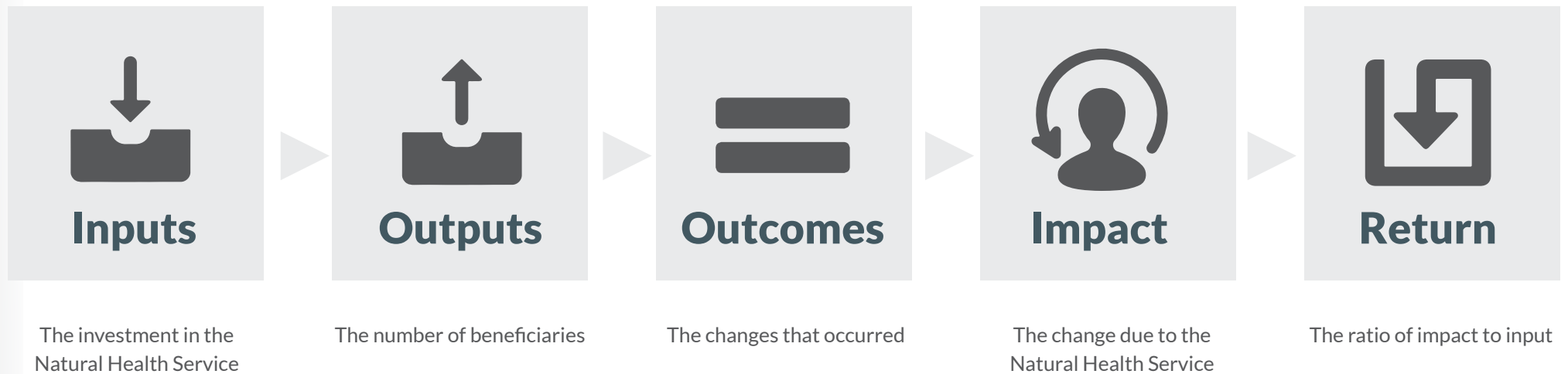
Natural Health Service pilot participant

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a framework for measuring and accounting for a concept of value that incorporates social, environmental and economic costs and benefits. SROI measures change in ways that are relevant to the people or organisations that experience or contribute to it. It tells the story of how change is created by measuring social, environmental and economic outcomes and uses monetary values to represent them. This enables a ratio of benefits to costs to be calculated.

This SROI analysis is a forecast and predicts the social value that will be created by providing natural health services to 6,000 people.

A primary purpose of the analysis is to support the case for the expansion of Natural Health Services and to help commissioners to justify future investment. A further purpose of the analysis is to ensure that both the design of the service and how the service is delivered are rooted in achieving outcomes that future participants and health and social care commissioners want.

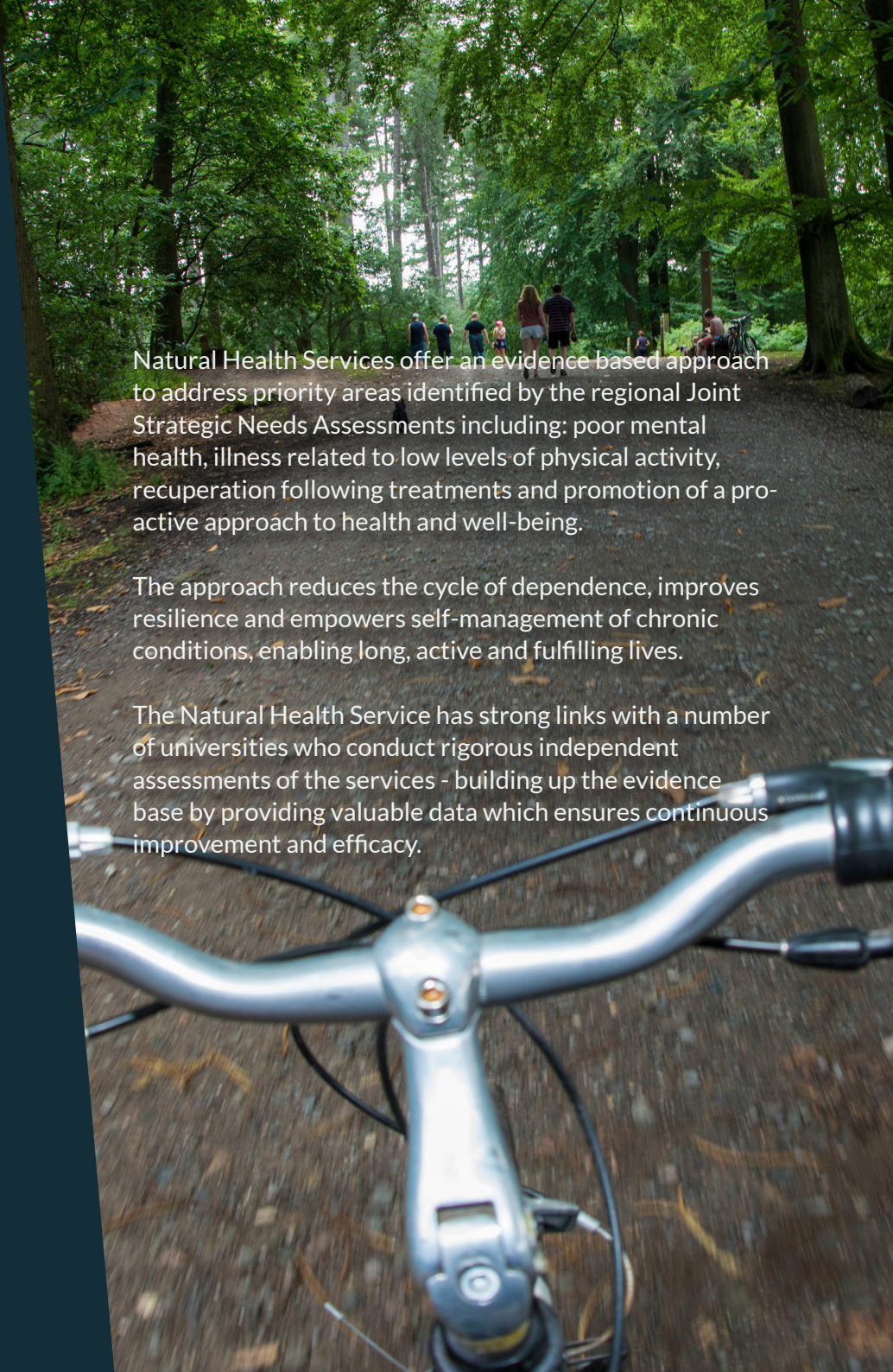
The SROI Process



The Natural Health Service

“I really look forward to class each week too, especially as it’s in my local woodland.”

Natural Health Service pilot participant

A photograph of a gravel path in a forest. In the foreground, the handlebars and front fork of a bicycle are visible, suggesting the perspective of someone riding. In the background, a group of people is walking away on the path, surrounded by lush green trees and foliage.

Natural Health Services offer an evidence based approach to address priority areas identified by the regional Joint Strategic Needs Assessments including: poor mental health, illness related to low levels of physical activity, recuperation following treatments and promotion of a proactive approach to health and well-being.

The approach reduces the cycle of dependence, improves resilience and empowers self-management of chronic conditions, enabling long, active and fulfilling lives.

The Natural Health Service has strong links with a number of universities who conduct rigorous independent assessments of the services - building up the evidence base by providing valuable data which ensures continuous improvement and efficacy.



Natural Health Services offer a wide range of evidence based expert- led activities, which include:

Health Walks

Mindful walking activities tailored to individual needs and designed to help meet target exercise and physical activity levels whilst improving mental wellbeing. Walking is one of the easiest ways to get more active, lose weight and become healthier breaking down barriers to positively influencing behavioural change.

Forest School

Targeted at increasing physical activity and improving mental well-being of young people. Forest School is an innovative approach to outdoor play and learning, inspiring individuals of any age through positive outdoor experiences. By participating in engaging, motivating and achievable tasks and activities, in a woodland environment, each participant has an opportunity to develop intrinsic motivation, emotional and social skills.

Horticulture Therapy and Green Gyms ©

Improving a participant's strength and stamina through nature-based projects, boosting practical skills and confidence , increasing physical activity and building social networks whilst benefiting local green spaces.

Mindful contact with nature


Specifically developed nature based mindfulness practice. Delivered in local woodlands which support full immersion in the natural environment. Focused on individuals with mild to moderate mental health issues for whom mindfulness practice may form part of a programme to improve mental health and increase resilience from day-to-day triggers of stress, depression and anxiety. Shown to increase capacity to self-manage long term chronic conditions.

What we want to achieve

“I love it here, especially
when we get to build
dens.”

Natural Health Service pilot participant





The theory of change for this SROI analysis is based on Community Forest Trust working together with a number of providers, who may not individually have the capacity to engage and contract with commissioners, to form a supply chain with scale and scope to deliver Natural Health Services.

Natural Health Services improve communities by offering solutions for health issues outside of costly traditional service provision. Further, they are available to individuals who cannot or do not want to access health services via traditional pathways.

People who participate in Natural Health Services benefit in a number of ways. People report that just by being with other people in an outside space they feel happier and have improved mental health. By getting involved in physical activity, participants become more physically healthy and report improvements in relation to weight issues and management of long term conditions. People also benefit by learning new skills such as horticulture.

A scaled up Natural Health Service can play a significant role in reducing health inequalities by targeting services in areas where there is a high degree of social deprivation and therefore increased health need. Natural Health Services encourage people to improve levels of physical activity and meet NHS recommended levels of exercise, which reduces need to access GP services and more expensive 'downstream' services such as A&E and inpatient services.

Public Health Teams are committed to the concept of Integrated Wellbeing Services, which help people live healthier for longer by addressing the factors that influence health and wellbeing. They recognise that Natural Health Services can play a part in this by helping people to maintain a healthy weight and by taking more exercise. This in turn leads to downstream cost savings within the public sector and also a reduction in health inequalities.

Natural health service providers have been working to support people to become healthier and access the outdoor environment for many years. Being part of the Natural Health Service supply chain will enable them to increase reach and secure new resources for their staff and therefore sustain their work with the people they aim to serve.

Landowners and land custodians such as Local Authorities, Forestry Commission and the Land Trust provide the land where all Natural Health Service activities take place. The land is used in a way that is fully consistent with objectives in that it promotes environmentally and economically sustainable uses and that helps to pull communities together and encourages healthy living.

Expected Outcomes

“It was great to be taking part in something that I knew was doing me some good whilst also working outside and helping the local community”

Natural Health Service pilot participant

Forecast outcomes for a scaled up Natural Health Service are based on the extrapolation of an analysis of the pilot. Key outcomes for participants will be:

- More physically active
- Improved physical health
- Improved mental health
- Healthier weight
- Happier and more confident
- Learning new skills
- Improved management of long term conditions

For Healthcare commissioners the key outcomes will be:

- Reduced need to access GP services
- Reduced need to access A&E services
- Reduced need to access impatient services
- Healthier population and reduction in health inequalities

In addition to the above the main organisations involved in the provision of the Natural Health Service will benefit from the following outcomes:

- Land owners – Furtherance of social and environmental objectives and surplus generated through this activity
- Providers - Increased reach and surplus generated through the activity
- Community Forest Trust – Furtherance of social and environmental objectives and a small return that can be reinvested in creating further green spaces for similar activities



Danny – a volunteer

Over several years Danny cared for his mother who had been diagnosed with dementia. Early on in her illness Danny would take her on walks. Danny found that walking kept his mother active and had a beneficial effect on her, as well as himself. He continued to take his mother on walks by himself because there was a lack of walking groups in the area – and none for people with an illness like dementia.

Danny volunteers as a Walking for Health walk leader. He sees first hand the benefits it has on people's lives. "I get a buzz out of people enjoying themselves on a walk. People seem to become more lively; you can really see the difference. They open up and start talking." Danny leads walks four to five times with a month. "It's a great activity for the socially isolated, people loosen up when they walk together and start talking. It's really good for their health and wellbeing. I can actually see the improvements when people come back".

Danny feels passionate about providing walks for people with illnesses and for carers too, "walks are good for carers; it gives them much needed respite, good company and fresh air".

The impact

“I was feeling isolated before taking part in my sessions, this was leading to low moods and subsequent weight gain. The course increased my contact with people in the area and got me more physically active. This led to me feeling happier”

Natural Health Service pilot participant

To calculate overall impact, outcome values are reduced to reflect deadweight, attribution and displacement.

Deadweight

Deadweight is a measure of the amount of outcome that would have happened even if the activity had not taken place. To calculate deadweight, we looked at the number of people using the Natural Health Services that may not have an underlying health condition at all.

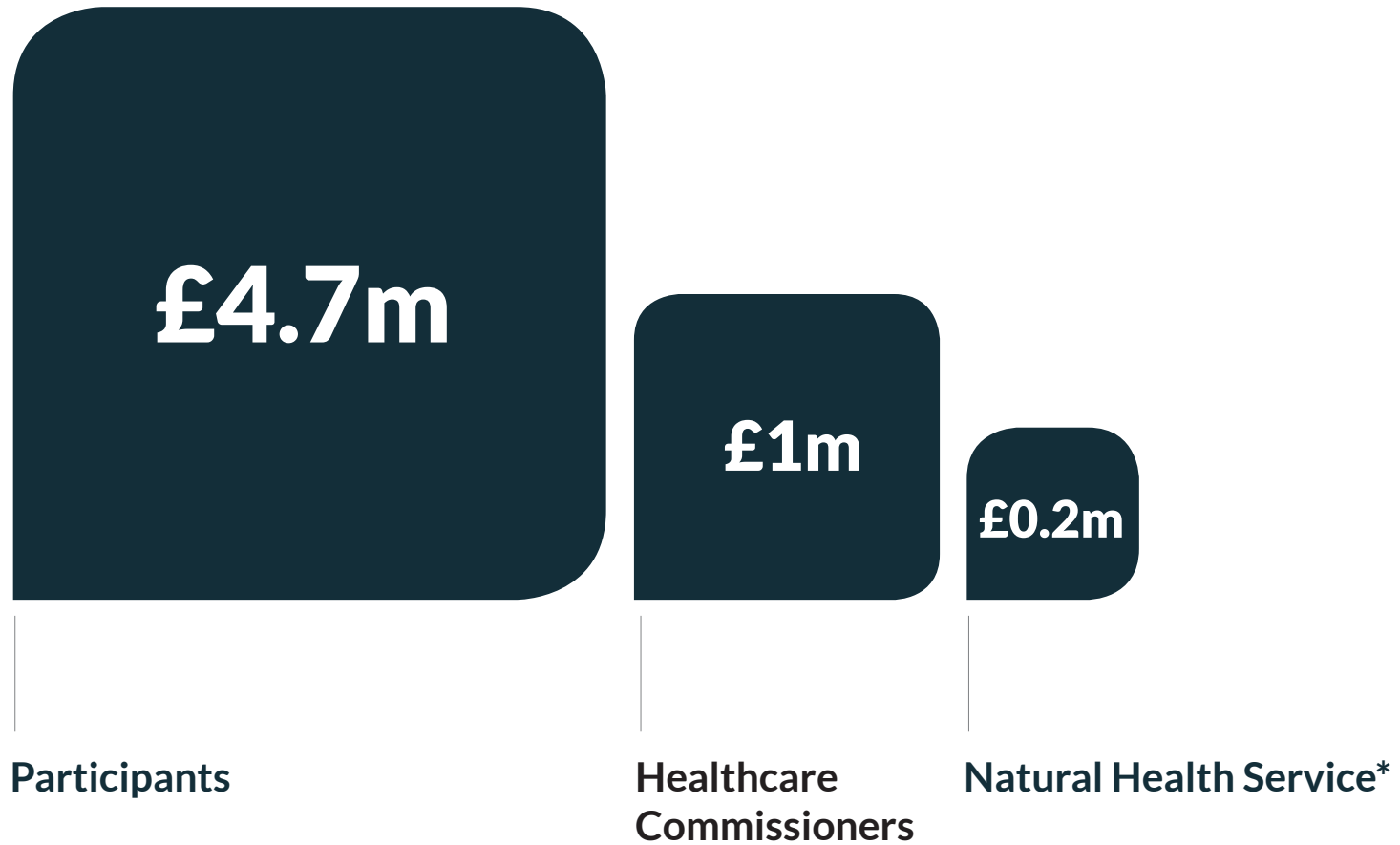
Attribution

Attribution is an assessment of how much of the outcome was caused by the contribution of other organisations or people. To calculate attribution, we looked at the number of people from the target market that would in any case have been involved in one or more sessions of sport per week

Displacement

Displacement is another component of impact and is an assessment of how much of the outcome displaced other outcomes. This is normally a consideration on projects that 'shift' a problem elsewhere.

Expected impact of the Natural Health Service based on working with 6,000 participants a year.



* Includes Community Forest Trust, Landowners and service providers.

Calculating the return

“Since walking on a regular basis my weight has dropped to a healthy level and I feel so much happier in myself”

Natural Health Service pilot participant

Prior to calculating the SROI on the investment in Natural Health Services the issues of duration and drop off of outcomes was considered.

Duration

Some outcomes will endure while others will last only a short amount of time. Calculating social return projects the value of outcomes achieved into the future depending on what the proposed duration is.

This SROI assessment only considers the value to those people who complete and benefit from the courses attended. In order to be prudent it is assumed that some of the participants will either not complete the course that they sign up for or will not benefit from the course. It is expected that the remaining participants will have a long-term benefit subject to drop off.

Drop off

Whilst long-term benefit is expected for successful participants, it is imprudent to fully ascribe this value to the Natural Health Service past year one. This is because although the Natural Health Service will have kick started a change in lifestyle, other factors and influences will play an increasingly vital role in ensuring that any change is permanent.

Social Value

Viewed over a 5-year period, total impact from engaging with 6,000 participants is = £13,037,051

Total investment figure in the same period to generate this value = £1,931,500

Social return of £6.75 for every £1 invested.

5-year Net Present Value Calculation

The SROI ratio, the return value from the activities expressed as a ratio of the investment is set out below. Calculations are discounted to take account of reduced value of money over time (discounted at 3.5% as advised in the Government Green Book for grant-aided investments).

This results in the total present value shown below.

Year	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Value	£5,844,947	£5,650,447	£1,412,612	£353,153	£88,288	£22,072	£13,371,519
NPV	£5,844,947	£5,459,369	£1,318,688	£318,534	£76,938	£18,584	£13,037,051

Learning and recommendations

“The mindfulness course introduced a real variety of exercises, which could all be done without too much effort, be brought into everyday life, a lot of which without even needing to take 20 or more minutes out.”

Natural Health Service pilot participant



What we learnt from this SROI analysis

- The proposed programme has been designed around the needs and recommendations of service users and in particular past participants of pilot Natural Health Services. This should ensure that the project meets many of their identified needs. The major benefits to participants will accrue around improved management of long term conditions, improvements to physical and mental health, feeling happier & more confident, and being more physically active.
- The programme has the potential to impact on a wide range of Commissioners key priorities. There are cost saving opportunities for Commissioners as well as the opportunity to develop new bespoke services delivered in an outdoor setting.
- The Natural Health Service makes a considerable contribution towards local authorities' aims in several areas. In particular the Natural Health Service is an upstream preventative intervention that can help reduce the need for higher cost social and health related interventions especially for people in areas of high social deprivation.

Recommendations

- Focus service expansion on areas of high social deprivation and people who have the greatest risk of developing avoidable long-term health conditions.
- Ensure that an accurate and comprehensive baseline is created for all new participants, especially in relation to existing conditions and current usage of healthcare services.
- Invest time in the development of systems to capture and report on metrics that are relevant to future commissioners of services.
- Work with commissioners, Local Authorities and investors to develop outcome-based commissioning models such as a Natural Health Service social impact bond.
- Develop robust supply chain management systems to ensure that Community Forest Trust is able to manage risk associated with prime contractor role.
- Develop the Natural Health Service brand and promote the benefits of this to both commissioners and providers.
- Market Natural Health Services directly to potential participants.
- Continue to develop centre of research excellence with universities and other stakeholders.

Impact Map Extract

Impact map extract shows indicators, expected quantities, data sources and financial proxies used for each Natural Health Service outcome

Stakeholders	Outcomes	Indicators	Expected Quantities	Data Source	Financial Proxy	Source
Participants of Natural Health Services	Is more physically active	Number of people taking part in more regular physical activity	2,040	Participant questionnaire and interview	WTP Participating in sport at least once a month	HACT Report - The value of non housing interventions
Participants of Natural Health Services	Has improved physical health	Number of people reporting improved physical health	1,680	Participant questionnaire and interview	WTP Relief from problems connected with: arms, legs, hand, feet, back	HACT Report - The value of non housing interventions
Participants of Natural Health Services	Has improved mental health	Number of people with diagnosed mental health issues reporting improvement	600	Participant questionnaire and interview	Cost of attending 12 psychotherapy or counselling sessions	Global value Exchange (derived from)
Participants of Natural Health Services	Has moved towards a more healthy weight	Number of people with diagnosed weight issues reporting improvement	720	Participant questionnaire and interview	Cost of membership of Weight Watchers for 52 weeks	Desk top research
Participants of Natural Health Services	Feels happier & more confident	Number of people reporting improved levels of happiness and confidence	1,740	Participant questionnaire and interview	Cost of Assertiveness and Building Personal Confidence training	Global value Exchange
Participants of Natural Health Services	Has made new friends	Number of people reporting that they now have more friends	1,320	Participant questionnaire and interview	Rent a friend cost for one hour times 10 weeks	Desk top research
Participants of Natural Health Services	Has learnt new skills	Number of people reporting that they have learnt a new skill	1,680	Participant questionnaire and interview	Cost of an introduction to gardening course	Desk top research
Participants of Natural Health Services	Improved management of long term conditions	Number of people with diagnosed LTC reporting improvement	1,080	Participant questionnaire and interview	WTP Relief from chest/breathing problems, asthma, bronchitis	HACT Report - The value of non housing interventions
Clinical Commissioning Groups	Reduced need to access GP services	Number of people with reduced need for GP services	2,640	Participant questionnaire and interview	Per patient contact lasting 11.7 minutes	PSSRU - 2013/14

Quantities of participants benefiting from the scaled up Natural Health Service and based on extrapolation of findings from an assessment of the Natural Health Service Pilot

Impact Map Extract

Impact map extract shows indicators, expected quantities, data sources and financial proxies used for each Natural Health Service outcome

Stakeholders	Outcomes	Indicators	Expected Quantities	Data Source	Financial Proxy	Source
Clinical Commissioning Groups	Reduced need to access A&E services	Number of people with reduced need for A&E services	1,680	Participant questionnaire and interview	Accident and Emergency treatments leading to admitted (not admitted)	PSSRU - 2013/14
Clinical Commissioning Groups	Reduced need to access inpatient services	Number of people with reduced need for inpatient services	2,040	Participant questionnaire and interview	Non elective inpatient stays - short stays	PSSRU - 2013/14
Land owners	Further social and environmental objectives and Surplus generated through this activity	The value of surplus generated	1	Community Forest Trust financial model for project	Forecast net surplus as per financial model	Community Forest Trust financial model for new development
Community Forest Trust	Further social and environmental objectives and small return that can be reinvested in creating further spaces for similar activities	The value of any planned contribution to overhead	1	Community Forest Trust financial model for project	Forecast contribution to overhead as per financial model	Community Forest Trust financial model for new development
Natural Health providers	Increased reach and surplus generated through the activity	The value of surplus generated	4,000	Community Forest Trust financial model for project	Forecast net surplus as per financial model	Community Forest Trust financial model for new development

Quantities of participants benefiting from the scaled up Natural Health Service and based on extrapolation of findings from an assessment of the Natural Health Service Pilot



For more information about the Natural Health Service- please visit our website:

www.naturalhealthservice.org.uk

or

email info@naturalhealthservice.org.uk

Community Forest Trust is a Registered Charity
No: 1072706.