



Lewes House Community Garden

Facilitated Evaluation Session

14/04/2022

**food
matters**
sustainable, fair food systems

Lewes House Community Garden

"It's a special space that's open to everyone - a space that we created together"



Fig 1. – "What one word that sums up how you feel about Lewes House Garden?"

About Lewes House Community Garden

Lewes House Community Gardening project provides free supported gardening sessions to the local community. The project is grounded in a belief that being surrounded by plants, helping them to grow, and spending time in nature, with others, is beneficial for many aspects of physical and mental health. The project provides a safe space to engage in gardening, socialise with other members and offers a peaceful place for participants to come to each week. The ethos of the project is one of inclusivity, with members representing a wide range of background and abilities.

Now into its third year, the project is funded by the Sussex Crisis Fund (Sussex Community Foundation) and the Enjoolata Foundation.

About Food Matters

Food Matters is a national charity dedicated to empowering people. We support communities to develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to make inclusive and representative decisions. Grounded in participatory approaches, we employ a suite of participatory tools to engage people in activities and exercises which help to explore and document different perspectives.

Background to the session

Food Matters was asked to lead a facilitated evaluation session to help members of the Lewes House Community Garden explore the benefits of attending. Given the range of physical and mental abilities of members, the evaluation was designed to be inclusive and easy to engage with. Food Matters facilitated two sessions over the course of one day.

Participants were encouraged to engage in three activities which looked to explore their reasons for involvement and the benefits of being involved.

Exercise 1: “What one word sums up how you feel about Lewes House Garden?”

- As a group, participants were asked to identify one word which sums up their feelings about being involved in the project (see fig.1)

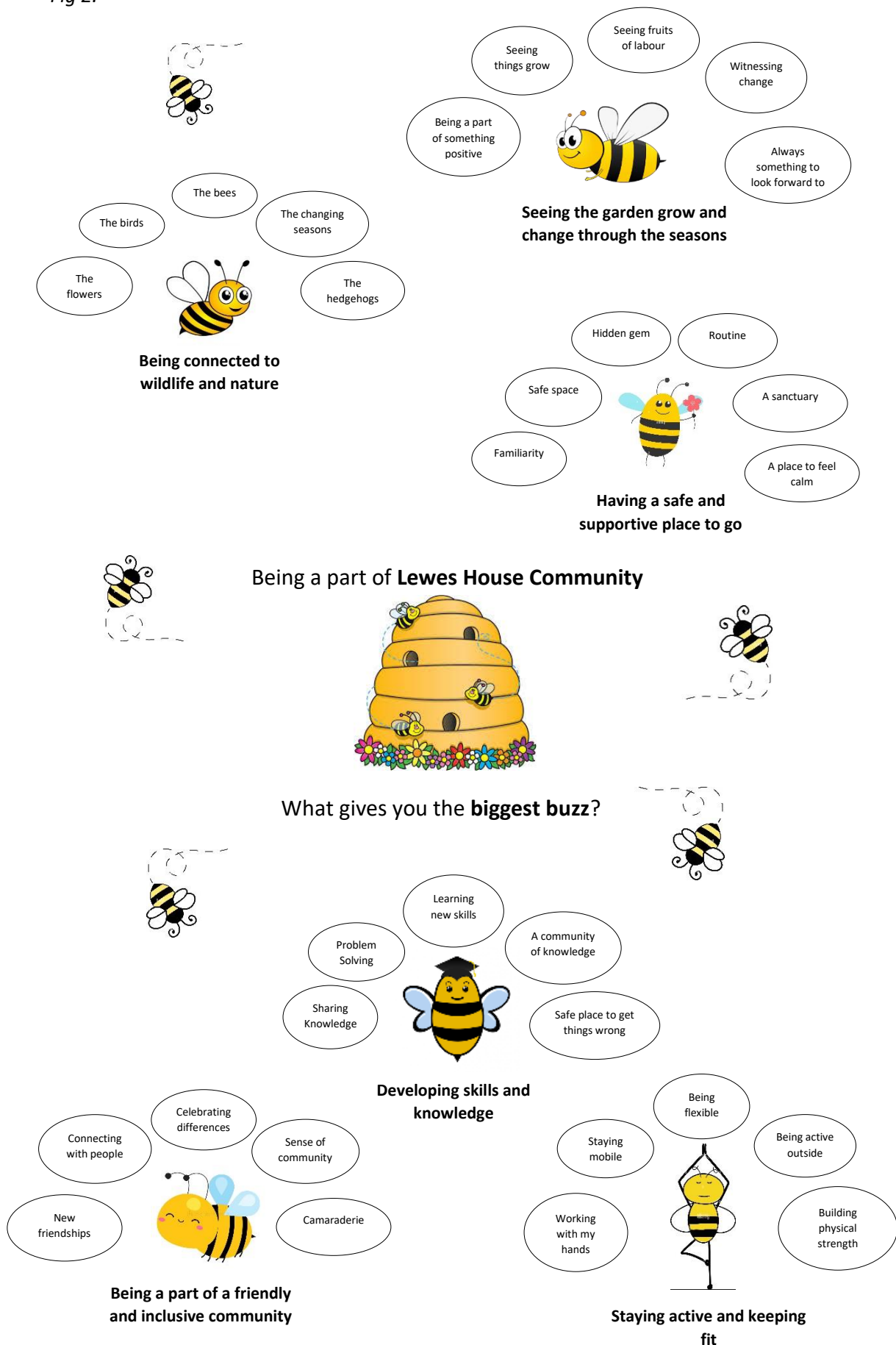
Exercise 2: “Being part of the Lewes House Gardening Group...What gives you the **biggest buzz?**”

- In groups of 2 to 3, participants asked to discuss what aspects of being involved gives them the “biggest buzz”.
- Prompt questions:
 - o What are the best things about it?
 - o What makes you feel most positive about it?
 - o Why do you come and what keeps you coming back?
- Participants brought back together to share and record answers (see fig.2)

Exercise 3: “Being part of the Lewes House Gardening Group...for you, what are the main benefits?”

- Through one-to-one informal interviews, participants asked to reflect on how their involvement in the project has benefited them (see fig.3).
- Participants prompted to think about how the project has impacted them socially, physically, and emotionally, and how it may have also helped to develop new skills and knowledge.

Exercise 2 – What gives you the ‘biggest buzz’ about being a part of Lewes House Community Gardens?
– Fig 2.



Exercise 2 – Transcribed responses

Wildlife and Nature

Wildlife

The birds

The bees

The hedgehogs

The return of familiar flowering plants

Protected

Secret garden/hidden gem

Skills & Knowledge

Always learning new skills

Sharing Knowledge

A community of knowledge

Community

The banter

Connection - "I like chatting to people who are as interested in plants as I am"

Connection - with both people and nature

Friendship

Celebrating differences

Camaraderie

Sense of community

"Witnessing so much kindness"

Interesting exchanges! (poetry, music, philosophy, hedgehogs)

Seeing how the stories of others develop

Our visits elsewhere

Working in a relaxed and conversational way

Familiarity

Being a part of something

A special space, open to everyone

Physical/Mental Benefits

Physical activity - working with hands

The satisfaction of physical work

Feeling calm

Feeling excited

Ultimate mindfulness

Gives a break from the everyday

Growth & Continuity

Seeing the garden growing

Positivity - things always grow

Seeing something emerge that is more than the sum of its parts, both as a garden and as a group

Witnessing change

Seeing the fruits of our labours

Seeing projects mature

Witnessing the miracle of seeds germinating

Exercise 3 – What are the benefits of being a part of Lewes House Community Garden? – *fig 3.*



Exercise 3 – Transcribed Responses*

People

"The people are nice"

"They help with all little pains - anything more they will find other people to help"

"Part of a community of very knowledgeable people"

"Cross-over between people - garden unifies us but celebrates differences"

"I've made a lot of friends here"

"Normally, I'm completely in my head - digging and working with my hands helps me focus on the present moment. You have to solve problems, and pay attention to what you are doing"

"Camaraderie, friendship and lovely people"

"I'm a helper here but, to be honest, there's a fine line. During the pandemic, coming here was especially important to me"

"How often do you get to sit down with a group of random people and share a cup of tea?"

"Really helpful for fighting loneliness. Nice to have the opportunity to speak to someone"

"Being here helps connect people of all ages; I really love learning from different generations"

"There's a real community spirit"

"We benefit from working as a team"

Skills

"An opportunity to share experiences and personal insights"

"Sharing knowledge - we are all from different backgrounds"

"Rosy and Annemarie's approach helps to foster confidence by creating a safe place to make mistakes and giving achievable tasks"

"It's a safe space where it is ok to get things wrong, we are all learning together"

"I have little gardening knowledge, but it doesn't matter. I have learnt a lot, and it doesn't matter if you make mistakes"

Mood

"Gave me a huge sense of purpose as I entered retirement - could've felt like a loss of purpose"

"Tuesdays I know I can come here – If I can't, I feel sad"

"I benefit enormously, physically and mentally from being in this garden"

"I always go away feeling better"

"Gives me something to look forward to"

"Being in the garden helps my mental health, particularly my anxiety"

"It's a special space that's open to everyone, a space that we created together. As a walled garden, it feels almost secret, a hidden gem in the heart of Lewes"

"When I leave, I feel very different to how I felt when I came. I switch on gardening and switch off everything else. It helps me to feel valued and provides a sense of worth"

"When I come here, it feels safe and very positive. I know I won't feel anxious. I will feel relaxed, and it's nice to feel like I'm doing something positive"

"Working with my hands takes me out of my head"

*Some responses paraphrased

Place

"The garden itself is an important part of what makes this group work"

"The wildlife is a huge part of the importance of being here. It's wonderful to see the garden change through the seasons"

"It's a privilege to be able to use the space"

"Wonderful having an opportunity to give back to nature"

"I love feeling like I am fitting in with the cycle of nature"

"The garden is a place that everyone and anyone can enjoy"

"The garden benefits us as much as we benefit the garden."

"The garden is a sanctuary in the modern world"

"It's good for the soul, this place"

"It's a break from the 'everyday'"

"I feel such affection for the place. It has been a real anchor for me in a new town; it has helped me to become a part of the community I now live in. There is a sense of belonging and camaraderie."

Physical

"It's nice just to physically be outside"

"I'm 84 years old and coming here helps me keep active and mobile"

"I have arthritis, and coming here helps me keep mobile"

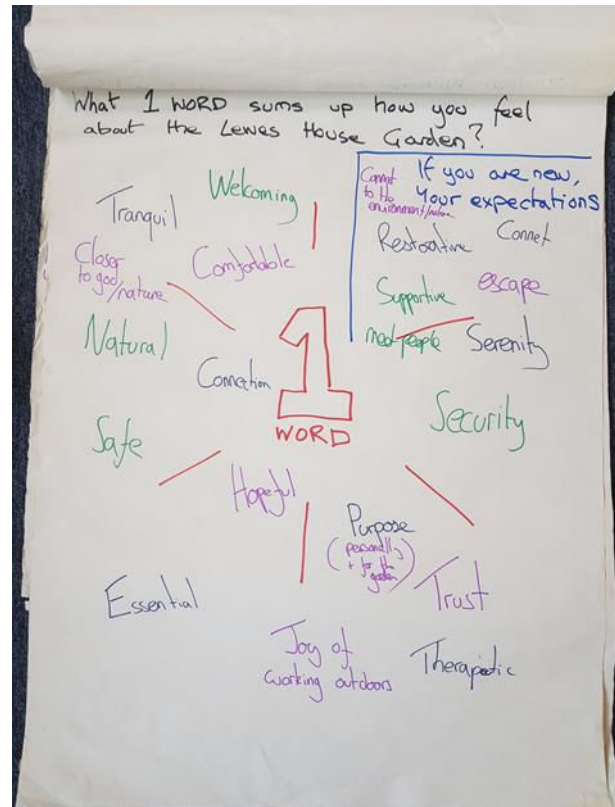
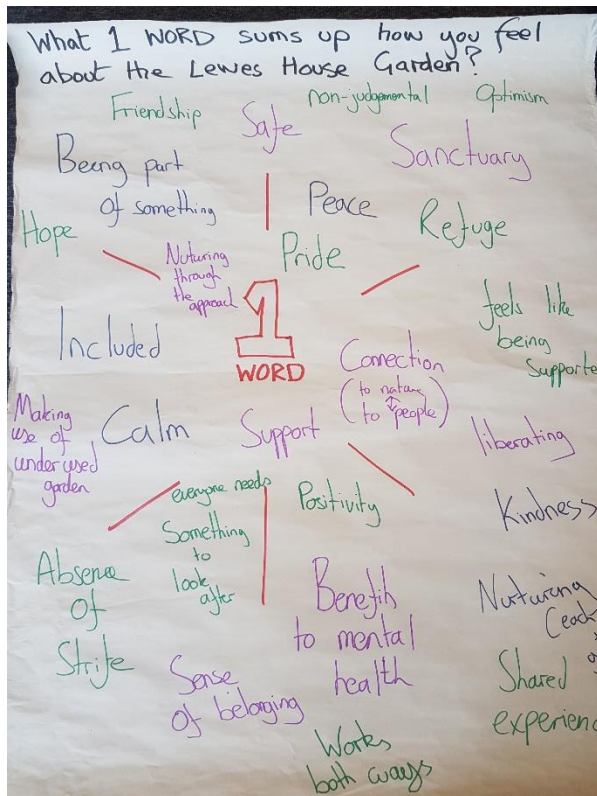
"Gardening has helped keep my mobility and dexterity"

"It helps to build physical strength but in a gentle and practical way"

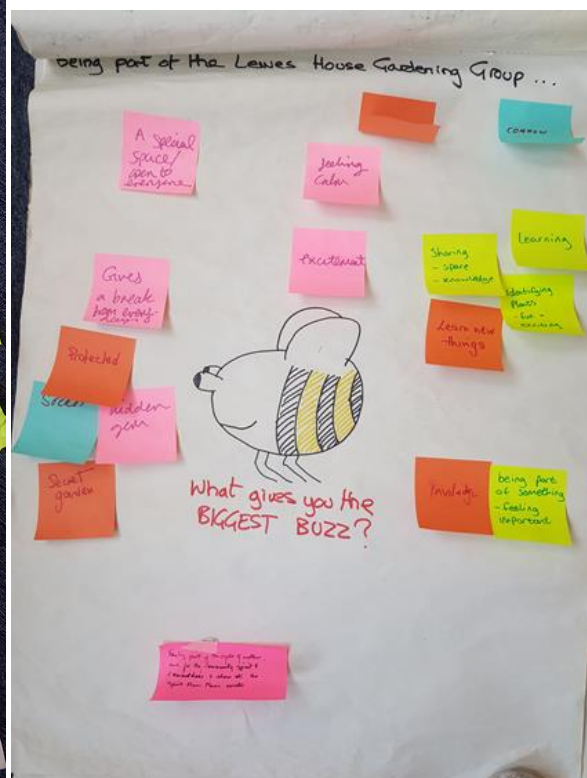
"Working with my hands helps to keep me out of my head"

Annex 1. Session Charts

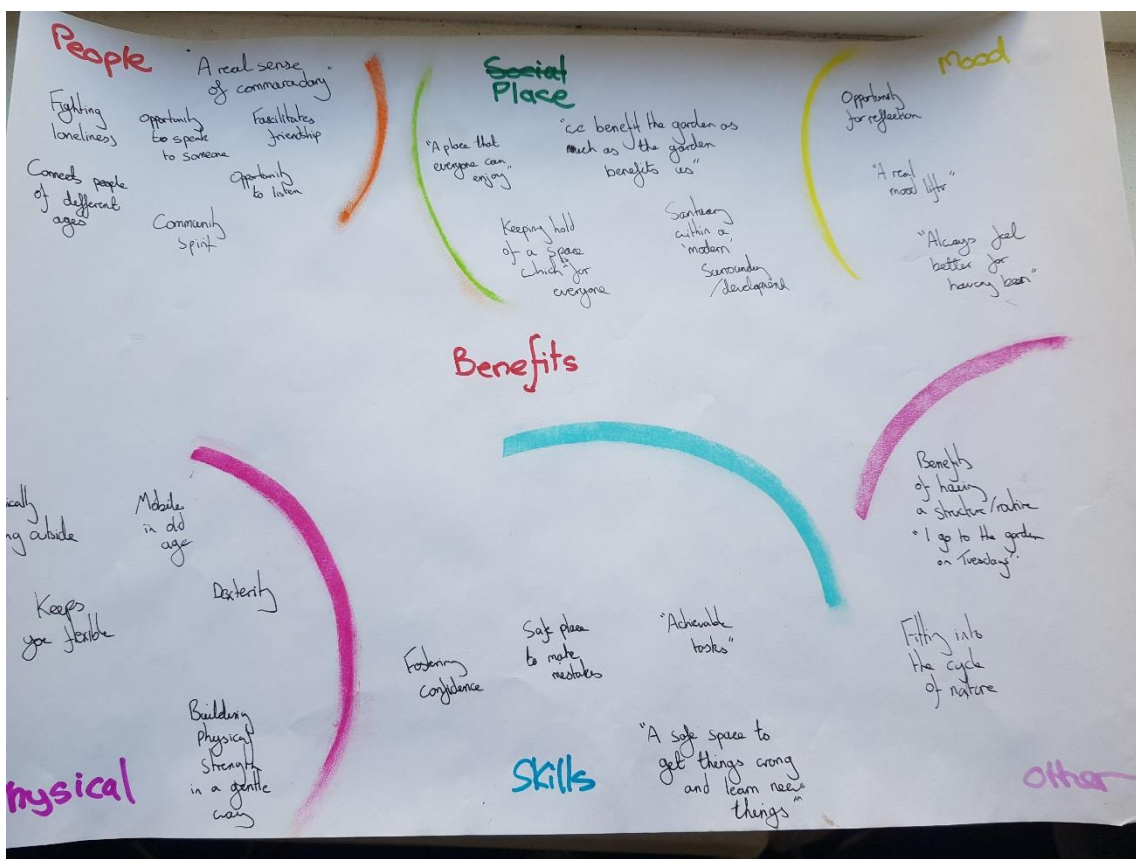
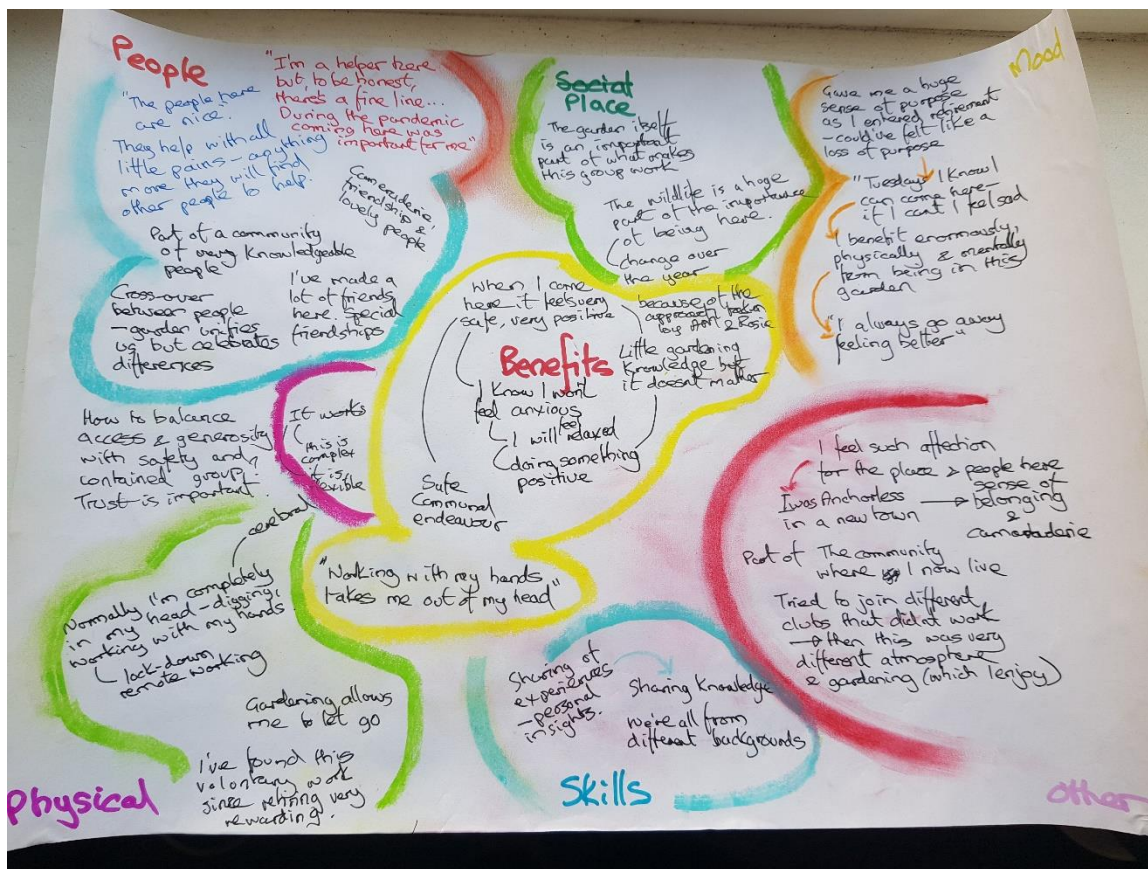
Exercise 1:

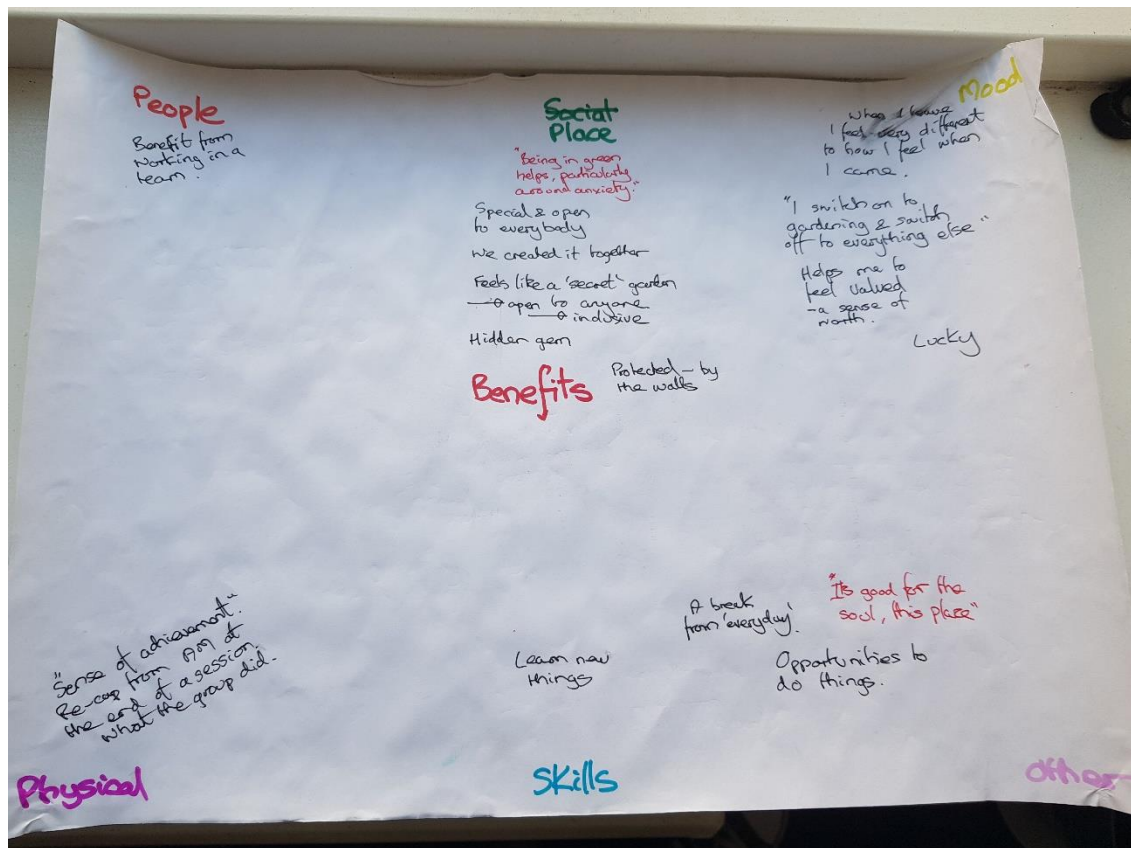


Exercise 2:



Exercise 3:





Annex 2. Session Photos





