

Prove it!

Its development and its potential for evaluating
community-based regeneration projects

Produced by **nef** (the new economics foundation) on behalf of
Barclays Bank plc, British Waterways, Countryside Agency and
Groundwork UK

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Introduction

Prove it! grew out of the recognition that what gets measured, matters, and that many positive outcomes of regeneration go unnoticed because only the things that are easy to count get counted.

So when a playground is born from the ashes of a piece of derelict land, the real impact on local people's quality of life just isn't captured by counting how many trees have been planted there. *Prove it!* has been developed as a way of evaluating community-based regeneration projects and has been in existence for more than five years. Three organisations were initially involved.

- Groundwork wanted to be able to show the effect of its projects on local people.
- Barclays Bank plc supported Groundwork through the Barclays' SiteSavers programme.
- **nef** (the new economics foundation) developed the methodology.

The latest phase of this development began in 2003, when the Countryside Agency and British Waterways joined Groundwork, Barclays and **nef** to create a partnership aimed at making *Prove it!* the leading evaluation toolkit in its field.

The introduction to the toolkit summarises what *Prove it!* does.

"Prove it! is about keeping evaluation simple, manageable and possible within the limited resources that small-scale projects have available to them. An approach involving data collection methods that are fun and easy to use can encourage ownership of the project and make it more likely that evaluation becomes part of the culture of an organisation, rather than a burden.

The principle behind Prove it! is to make the collection of data part of the process of regeneration in itself. Many of the overriding aims of a project (for example, improving the social capital of a community) can be achieved by involving local people in its evaluation as well as its delivery. Our experience tells us that evaluation can add real value, build capacity of local groups and people, and can demonstrate impact on quality of life."

The purpose of this report is to enable others to gauge how well we have done and to measure what the potential is for wider use.

Executive summary

Prove it! began as a partnership between Groundwork, Barclays Bank plc and **nef** in 1999. The results of some initial pilots were written up as a handbook.

To use a computing metaphor, this was the equivalent of the *Acorn* in the development of the home computer – it needed enthusiasm and specialist knowledge to develop its potential. Gradually, the *Windows* version has evolved. The *Prove it!* toolkit consists of a series of MS Word and Excel documents combining materials (spreadsheets, questionnaire, poster) and instructions on how best to use them. It contains three main tools:

1. A **Project Storyboard**, for understanding how a project's intended activities will lead to change.
2. A **Survey Questionnaire** that can be completed at the start and at the end of a project, both by project participants and by members of the wider community.
3. A **Poster Evaluation Session** for people involved in or affected by the project, so that they can reflect on the impacts a project has made and the lessons that have been learnt.


The toolkit was tested by 56 pilot projects during 2003–2004. These projects came from five organizations: British Waterways; BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers); Countryside Agency; Groundwork; and the Wildlife Trusts. nef provided two training workshops and an on-line discussion forum.

We conducted a telephone survey over the summer to find out what the pilots thought of *Prove it!* We found that 84 per cent of them had used it. Reasons for not using it included delays in the project or changes in personnel rather than shortcomings in the toolkit.

Since the questionnaire can be used at the start and at the finish of the project, the toolkit has four main elements. We found that, on average, each pilot had used two of them. They found many advantages:

- It is flexible.
- It is easy of use.
- It provides a framework and a structure.
- It helps with community participation.
- It appears to capture the effect of a project on social capital.

Here is one particularly enthusiastic quote from a pilot:

 *"I think it's fantastic. It assists – it's not a burden. It isn't dry either – it helps you to be imaginative about the project."*

Our experience of this phase allowed us to draw some conclusions:

- *Prove it!* works best for smaller projects that have community involvement.
- *Prove it!* works best for formative rather than summative evaluation. (We explain the distinction later on.)
- *Prove it!* supports the direction that regeneration and evaluation policy is taking.
- All evaluation methods, including *Prove it!*, flourish in the right circumstances: a supportive culture within the organisation concerned; low turnover in personnel; a well-established community group; and a confident member of staff with experience of participative working. Of all of these, the supportive culture is perhaps the most important.

With these provisos, we recommend *Prove it!* to the regeneration sector.

The background

In this section we look at four subjects: evaluation; evidence-based policy-making; participation; and social capital. We set out the policy and academic context for *Prove it!* and explain the values and attitudes that we bring to that context.

Evaluation

According to the Cornell University website, “Perhaps the most important basic distinction in evaluation types is that between *formative* and *summative* evaluation.” The nature of the distinction is well-put by Robert Stakes, “When the cook tastes the soup, that’s formative; when the guests taste the soup, that’s summative.” More formally, “formative evaluation is a method of judging the worth of a program while the program activities are forming or happening. Formative evaluation focuses on the *process*. Summative evaluation is a method of judging the worth of a program at the end of the program activities. The focus is on the *outcome*.”¹

It took time to understand that the participative, community-based approach that *Prove it!* takes makes it well suited to formative evaluation. It is not as suited to summative evaluation. Drawing conclusions, often across a range of projects, in a way that allows generalisations to be made, requires more attention to sampling and to consistency in interviewing than most community-based projects can manage.

There is one sense, though, in which *Prove it!* does not fit the formative/summative divide: where it is used for judging the worth of a program at the end of the activities. The organisation that ran the project and the members of the community tell themselves the story of the project primarily for their own learning rather than comparison with other projects.

Prove it! seems to fit with developments in evaluation generally. National renewal projects like New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Management have emphasised the need for community-based evaluations to *complement* the national – *summative* – efforts.

¹ LinguaLinks website

Evidence-based policy-making

Emphasising the use of evidence in policy-making has been part of the Labour Government's attempt to modernize government. A 1999 Cabinet Office report, *Professional Policy Making for the Twenty-First Century*, argues that, "policy making must be soundly based on evidence of what works." Two years later, another Cabinet Office report, *Better Policy Making*, reckons that policy-making was "more informed by evidence" than hitherto. Its evidence included the reviewing of existing policies; the commissioning of new research; the piloting of new initiatives; and the evaluation of new policies.

Underplayed in all this is the question of what policy-makers (and others) do with their evidence. Do they reflect on it and integrate it with their existing understanding of the world? One book on evidence-based policy states, "Action research [a particular reflexive approach] has been promoted largely with a view to enhancing practitioner knowledge rather than influencing policy on a national scale."² This seems a sad dichotomy.

Participation

The objectivity of outside researchers is thought to have a clear value in obtaining an unbiased picture of a project. There are several 'buts' though. The first is that 'objectivity' and 'unbiased' do not always go together. Take, for example, a crime survey undertaken by local schoolchildren in Merthyr Tydfil in 1996. The police recognized it as more reliable than their own records, because people were more prepared to tell schoolchildren the truth. Secondly, even when outsiders produce an unbiased account, it won't be as rich as an account produced by insiders. This is important for formative evaluation, which has community learning at its heart. How much is learned will depend on the richness of the picture. Thirdly, if local people are involved, the measurement becomes part of the project. *Prove it!* has developed the tools that enable it to be used to help plan the project from the outset. Involving people in monitoring a project may help in getting them involved in other aspects.

In sum, for the type of evaluation that *Prove it!* supports, participation is invaluable.

Social capital

Background

Improvements to quality of life are extremely difficult to measure. In an effort to understand the path from an activity or intervention to this ultimate goal of a regeneration initiative, it is necessary to examine the stages along the way. Some of these are easy to measure – the number of facilities built, or the number of volunteers who have been involved. Some of them lie so far in the future that it is extremely difficult to attribute any credit to one single project. In order to address this challenge, the latest version of *Prove it!* has focused on one particular aspect of this path: the role of social capital.

Social capital and policy

A definition of social capital appears in the Performance and Innovation Unit's (PIU) comprehensive literature review and discussion paper which describes it as

² Davies Huw T.O., Sandra M. Nutley and Peter C. Smith (editors), *What Works?, Evidence-based policy and practice in public services*, Policy Press, Bristol, 2001

consisting of the “networks, norms, relationships, values and informal sanctions that shape the quantity and co-operative quality of a society’s social interactions”.³

It describes the three main types of social capital as: *bonding* social capital (e.g. among family members or ethnic groups); *bridging* social capital (e.g. across ethnic groups); and *linking* social capital (e.g. between different social classes). Social capital in itself is not necessarily a positive or a negative thing – the Mafia has high bonding social capital!

The most widely accepted measure used to demonstrate the presence or absence of social capital is ‘trust in other people’. Thanks to the extensive work of Robert Putnam⁴ and others, it is already possible to make a convincing link between improvements in people’s quality of life and corresponding levels of social capital.

The PIU report makes a case for positive intervention by government to promote the accumulation of beneficial kinds of social capital whilst calling for better ways to measure it and how it changes in response to policy interventions. It concludes that: “social capital should be seen as giving policymakers useful insights into the importance of community, the social fabric and social relations at the individual, community and societal level. As such, it can open up a range of new policy levers but it is not a simple or single magic bullet for solving all policy problems.”

Although the PIU paper looks mainly at social capital on the macro scale, in terms of the implications for national policy it very quickly devolves down to issues that are relevant on the local level, particularly for civil society.

How Prove it! can help

So what has this got to do with playgrounds? The hypothesis behind *Prove it!* is that improving a physical space encourages people to come together, thus creating opportunities for meetings and conversations which support the development of networks of trust and mutual understanding from which individuals can work together to improve their own quality of life.

If local people are involved in the planning and planting, this “coming-together” process can begin long before the playground is completed. Moreover, the evaluation of such a project provides the framework in which those meetings and conversations can take place.

The *Prove it!* toolkit aims to achieve a thorough understanding of hypotheses such as these. Although, since 2002, various measures have become more widely accepted and used – for example the Home Office Citizenship Survey measured trust, participation in civic affairs and volunteering – the ephemeral nature of social capital means that information from quantitative summative indicators collected by questionnaire are inadequate for understanding the whole story of how social capital is being created.

³ The PIU report “Social Capital – A Discussion Paper, April 2002” can be downloaded at <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/su/social%20capital/socialcapital.pdf>

⁴ Cited in Appendix 1 of Walker et al, *Prove it! Prove it! Measuring the effects of neighbourhood renewal on local people*, nef, London, 2000

What is *Prove it!*?

One way of understanding the development of *Prove it!* is by analogy with the three phases of the development of the personal computer.

In the early days, if it wasn't part of your job, home computing was for the enthusiast. A lot of specialist knowledge and large pieces of machinery were needed to move a dot across a screen. Later on we started using Apples and Acorns, and that required us to be fluent in a mysterious foreign tongue known as machine code. By the time most of us started using computers at work, Bill Gates's *MSDos* (Microsoft Disc Operating System) was widespread, and did most of the complicated stuff for us. All we had to know was which command to type in and a few keystrokes later we found what we were looking for. With the advent of Microsoft's *Windows*, we no longer needed to know the detailed commands: it was just a case of pointing to a picture and clicking a mouse. We can now concentrate on what the tool is for, without spending ages understanding how to work it.

The Acorn phase

***Prove it! Mark I* – January 1999 to June 2001**

In February 1999, Groundwork staff from 16 pilot Barclays' SiteSavers projects, together with the residents involved, chose a core set of indicators that fitted into a social and human capital framework devised by **nef**. Three months later, the first set of data was collected. While **nef** provided advice on surveying (who, how, where, survey design etc.), planning and preparation placed a heavy burden on Groundwork staff. To refer to our PC analogy, we had a machine, but it was complicated to use and really needed a specialist.

We started the second survey in December 1999. The results were analysed and the whole process reported in a handbook, *Prove it! Measuring the effect of neighbourhood renewal on local people*, published in June 2000. We launched the results of the various surveys a year later.

MS Dos

***Prove it! Lite* – July 2001 to October 2002**

With *Prove it! Lite* we attempted to distill the specialist knowledge on indicators into a core list of questions, thereby cutting out the difficult questionnaire development process. In our PC analogy, we moved from relying on 'machine code' to providing simple commands for people to use themselves. We then involved a handful of Groundwork Trusts to use those indicators to demonstrate the real impact of their projects.

Because of the pressures on the people delivering projects, we found that it was difficult to get people to use *Prove it! Lite*. We concentrated on creating a set of evaluation tools that, used together, would help to tell a project's story.

At the same time, we realized that we had taken our eye off the ball as far as community participation was concerned. By taking away the participative development phase of the questionnaire, it was possible that the ownership of projects and their evaluations could end up remaining with Groundwork staff rather than with the local people who were living with the results.

Windows

***Prove it! Toolkit* – March 2003 to date**

As with Microsoft's *Windows*, the *Prove it! Toolkit* presents the project manager with a collection of icons to click on in order to carry out a meaningful and useful evaluation of their work. Also like *Windows*, the system was tested by a number of selected users before being released generally. This was vital for ironing out the glitches.

Whereas the original *Prove it!* handbook focused on developing the issues and indicators for asking the questions that mattered to a community, the latest

manifestations of the toolkit have concentrated on collecting more of the qualitative, formative information around a renewal project's impacts. The toolkit puts more emphasis on capturing the story of how people directly involved and affected by a project believe it will make a difference (Storyboard) and, by looking back on completion, at how the project actually worked in relation to the original hypothesis. (Evaluation Poster).

These tools, by virtue of being participative, encourage the necessary ownership amongst project participants for the findings of an evaluation to provide an effective framework for proving and improving a project's impact.

After more than four years of pilot projects, *Prove it!* has been used across the UK and its results have been published in one briefing paper and one handbook. *Prove it!* has been cited and drawn upon for work undertaken by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, Audit Commission, Active Community Unit, The Forestry Commission, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Housing Corporation.⁵

Prove it! has been widely publicized. It was promoted at the 4th National Conference on Neighbourhood Management, The Social Enterprise Network's Social Capital Explained Conference, The Community Foundation's Norms and Networks Conference, The New Opportunities Fund's Capacity Building Indicators Workshop, and Brinnington's Community First Conference.

The most tangible outcome of these presentations is the interest shown by the Social Enterprise Network in London to implement *Prove it!* among smaller organisations. The toolkit can provide an excellent starting point for social enterprises that have never conducted evaluations before or have limited resources to do so.

⁵ For a brief history of *Prove it!* and more on Social Capital, please refer to the *Prove It Handbook* and *Prove it! Prove it! Measuring Impact of Renewal, 2001*.

The toolkit

The *Prove it!* toolkit consists of a series of MS Word and Excel documents combining materials (spreadsheets, questionnaire, poster) and instructions on how best to use them.

Prove it! is now packaged as an easy-to-access CD Rom that contains all the instructions, forms and spreadsheets needed to complete an evaluation. Data is collected using a combination of tools:

1. A **Project Storyboard** serves as a template for understanding how a project's intended activities will lead to change. This should be used as close to the start of the project as possible, so that subsequent evaluation can be planned. The first stage of developing any project is about understanding the hypothesis (the story) for how particular activities address an identified need and lead to a particular outcome. The first part of the *Prove it!* Toolkit involves a simple two-part exercise for project managers to use on their own or ideally with project workers and key people involved in the project. This sets out the hypothesis and helps plan the timetable of activities, as well as the best times to carry out an evaluation of outcomes. It is particularly useful in terms of learning when reviewing the project to see how things turned out.
2. A **Survey Questionnaire** is available for completion by all project participants during the life of the project and members of the wider community. In addition, this MS Excel file contains linked spreadsheets for entering data collected both before and after a project has been completed. These in turn automatically update a series of graphs so that the data can be viewed and compared easily for analysis. To simplify things, we have chosen a core list of the indicators that have emerged as most suitable for measuring a project's impact on social capital and quality of life. If a project manager chooses to add indicators to the core list, and wishes to use them in the questionnaire, we have provided a separate folder: *Additional Question Design*. This contains blank question templates and corresponding data entry and graph sheets that can be used in conjunction with the main questionnaire.
3. A **Poster Evaluation Session** for up to a dozen people involved or affected by the project takes between 1½ and 2½ hours. This is the last part of the data collection process for a *Prove it!* evaluation. It is designed so that those who have been involved in the project can look back over the work and reflect on the impacts it has had and the lessons that have been learnt. It also provides an opportunity for someone who has not been directly involved with the project to play the part of auditor, checking the findings as interpreted by the project managers. This helps determine whether the hypotheses on how the project creates impact stand up in reality, particularly in terms of how delivery of the project has measured up to the original *Project Storyboard*.

The Poster (which is based on *Look Back Move Forward* tool developed by nef with the Shell Better Britain Campaign) provides a structure for a 1½ to 2½ hour meeting. Up to 12 people are selected randomly from project managers, participants, and the wider community panel and are invited to attend. A facilitator (ideally the outsider playing the part of auditor) uses a set of instructions to guide people through a series of stages that focus on different aspects of the project's outputs and outcomes. Traditional evaluation using indicators before and after a project is usually best for catching intended outcomes. This Poster session is designed to acknowledge these, as well as to understand some of the unintended and unexpected consequences of the project, particularly throughout the process of its delivery.

The toolkit can be used at three levels. Levels 1 and 2 in Table 1 are the main ones. As the description of Level 3 shows, it is possible to use *Prove it!* for

summative evaluation. However, in order to make claims for a project's impact on the whole population of a community, the questionnaire needs to be administered to a random sample of respondents. This is unlikely to be feasible with a project where the community is deeply involved in the evaluation. This is not a role for which *Prove it!* is best suited.

Table 1: Levels at which the toolkit can be used

Level		1	2	3
What can be measured		A view of the impact of the project and learning from how it was delivered.	As for 1, plus a view of the impact of the project on a community's level of social capital.	As for 2, plus a statistical analysis of the impact the project has had on levels of social capital in the community.
Who	Project participants (people who have been directly involved in the project)	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Wider community	If possible	Yes (non-random sample)	Yes (random sample)
Tools	Storyboard	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Questionnaire	No	Yes	Yes
	Poster	Yes	Yes	Yes

What the toolkit can do

The toolkit can now be used in the early stages of project planning. This reduces the burden of evaluation and encourages project managers to think about evaluation even before the project has started.

It allows stakeholders to construct a story about their project that they all share and promote. This story encourages stakeholders to think not only about the outcomes of the project but to be realistic about the resources, incentives and activities needed to accomplish them.

It allows project managers to create graphs that illustrate the impact and changes their projects have effected.

The evaluation poster has been expanded. It can be used not only as a tool for looking backward and thinking forward but also as a way to understand how and why certain outcomes were reached.

The 2003–2004 pilots

There were 56 pilot projects.

British Waterways	7
BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers)	4
Countryside Agency	5
Groundwork	38
Wildlife Trusts	2

Support

Two rounds of *Prove it!* training workshops were delivered, one in the summer of 2003 and the other early in 2004. These workshops were aimed at preparing project managers to use the evaluation toolkit. More than 57 practitioners and volunteers from Groundwork, British Waterways and the Countryside Agency attended these one-day workshops. Attendants received a CD Rom containing the forms, instructions and spreadsheets needed to complete a *Prove it!* evaluation.

We created an on-line *Prove it!* discussion forum located at the Countryside Agency's Learning Network. Intended to provide additional support to practitioners implementing the toolkit and increase the number of projects that complete the evaluation, this forum contains all the documents, forms and instructions needed to conduct a *Prove it!* evaluation. Practitioners and volunteers can use this forum to exchange experiences and concerns about their evaluation projects and to celebrate their successful use of *Prove it!*

Alternatives to *Prove it!*

When we surveyed the pilots, we asked people what they saw as alternatives. Several people said that the only alternative they knew of was informal, ad hoc evaluation:

- 👍 *“Prove it! is the only structured scheme. The alternative is ad hoc indicators.”*
- 👍 *“Normal Q and A meetings. But they wouldn’t allow for the same depth of discussion as the poster has done.”*
- 👍 *“We have standard evaluation forms. Otherwise very little else available to us.”*
- 👍 *“I use more qualitative, personal and instinctive ways to evaluate. Less objective, more individually tailored to the people involved. It is monitoring that fits in with others ways of measuring. I might be asking (informally) questions around the expectations of the users and people who are implementing the project.”*
- 👍 *“We tend to do evaluation questionnaires of an informal sort as it is. We also keep records of what people say from meetings and focus groups.”*
- 👍 *“No alternatives. Always difficult to evaluate. We always evaluate projects, but every way is different, e.g. video project could be one sort of evaluation.”*

One staff member who liked it compared *Prove it!* to other models such as community appraisal and visioning, suggesting he was thinking of it as a way of helping to plan a project as well as to evaluate it.

Active Partners

Active Partners is the closest alternative of which we know. It started out as the excellent ‘Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Development in Northern Ireland’ (comprising a report and a handbook for practitioners).⁶ There are 10 ‘building blocks of community development’, each with an average of at least 20 suggested indicators. This work, carried out by the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC),⁷ evolved and is now known as ABCD – ‘Achieving Better Community Development’.

The ABCD framework is concerned with the long-term process of community development. Yorkshire Forward saw an opportunity to adapt it to community participation in regeneration. Their ‘Active Partners, Benchmarking for Community Participation in Regeneration’⁸ was developed by consultants called COGS (Communities and Organisations – Growth and Support).⁹ They involved people active in a range of communities across the region to identify four key dimensions that need to be strategically addressed in order to enable effective community participation.

⁶ *Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Development in Northern Ireland*, Voluntary Activity Unit, for Department of Social Services, Castle Buildings, Stormont, Belfast BT4 3PP tel: 01232 520 504

⁷ Contact Stuart Hashagan at SCDC on 0141 248 1924

⁸ *Active Partners, Benchmarking for Community Participation in Regeneration*, Yorkshire Forward, 2 Victoria Place, Leeds LS11 5AE tel: 0113 243 9222 fax: 0113 243 1088 web-site: www.yorkshire-forward.com

⁹ Contact COGS on tel/fax: 0114 255 4747 e-mail cogs@cogs.solis.co.uk

The four dimensions are: influence (of the community on regeneration); inclusivity; communication; and capacity. Twelve benchmarks, each with suggested indicators, have been developed in relation to these four dimensions. For example, one of the benchmarks for 'influence' is 'there is meaningful community representation at all decision making bodies from initiation'. One of the indicators for this benchmark is 'community representatives are elected by, and accountable to, the wider community'. People are free to add their own.

This family of approaches has in common a lengthy and comprehensive set of indicators covering inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes. They all suggest a range of methods of data collection: consulting records (such as constitutions, policies and minutes); observation; and surveying. What is appropriate depends on the indicators chosen.

To summarise, these approaches are mainly about the quality of community participation in a regeneration project. This contrasts with *Prove it!*, which is more about the effect a regeneration project has on the community.

The evaluation

Methodology

Our principal method was a survey of the pilots using semi-structured telephone interviews (see Appendix 1 for the interview protocol). As we surveyed over the summer holidays, we did not manage to speak to all the pilots. We have no reason to believe though that those we spoke to were unrepresentative of those we did not.

We also used the views collected by questionnaire at the second training sessions, which took place in Leeds, Birmingham and London. We had intended that the website would record who had done what, but we found that pilot members who struggled to find time to do the evaluation were reluctant to spend further time uploading their results.

Table 2: How Prove it! was used

Number of pilots interviewed	32
Of which, the number that had used <i>Prove it!</i>	27
Of which, the number that had used:	
The storyboard	9
Questionnaire 1	21
Questionnaire 2	13
The poster	9
Number that hadn't used <i>Prove it!</i>	5
Reasons for not using <i>Prove it!</i>	
Project delay	3
Personnel changes	2
Number of pilots using <i>Prove it!</i> that had started their project before the first <i>Prove it!</i> training	7

Of the pilots surveyed, 84 per cent had used *Prove it!* Of those that had not, none of the stated reasons were connected with *Prove it!* itself.

Turning to the elements of the toolkit, it is striking that the questionnaires, which take more work, had been used more often than the storyboard and the poster. Much of this difference can be attributed to timing. Of the 27 pilots that used *Prove it!* 7 had started planning their projects before the first training session. This often meant that they had already done the equivalent of the storyboard and, to a lesser extent, the first questionnaire.

The pilots commented on different parts of the toolkit:

- 👍 *“We used the questionnaire only. We found that the most useful part of the toolkit. We did three door-to-door surveys, and for one we used the Prove it! toolkit. It was like a ballot presenting people with different possible viewpoints. The problem with community groups and projects is that the loud voices take over and destroy the group, so because of that doing the PI questionnaire put those people into context. It allows other voices to come to the fore. For example, there was an issue that arose about parents taking more responsibility for their children. This got the message across in a shared way, so it wasn't just coming from one individual.”*
- 👍 *“The steering group found the poster session particularly useful and enjoyable. It gave them a chance to sit back and look at the progress of the project over the last year and really evaluate what worked and what did not. Many participants said that it is rare in a project that you would all make the time to get together to do just that and that they feel the poster session was extremely useful.”*

What the pilots thought of *Prove it!*

Overall views

With regard to the question on alternatives to *Prove it!* The pilots had this to say:

- 👍 *“Nothing else that could do the same thing. It is the best that I have come across.”*
- 👍 *“Prove it! has got it all; formal and informal. It gives different answers, exploration of softer outcomes and more chance for discussion.”*
- 👍 *“Not many, if any. We tend only to get subjective feedback at the moment, and so PI fills a gap. We often do a questionnaire at the outset, because they inform the scheme and the planning. The “after” is important too, but often neglected, so Prove it! gives us a format for measuring the same things. We have to count outputs (trees and numbers etc,) sometimes we ask our partners how they think it has gone. We hardly ever go back to the same people who took part in the initial consultation. Prove it! gives a framework and a reminder to do this. Often we just move on. We don't often ask the community what they think of the work done. We need to be a bit more humble, and honest about how a project has been successful.”*

They had other comments to make too:

- 👍 *“I recommend it for any project (or part of a project) with community involvement.”*
- 👍 *“It sells the trust well. It works with politicians, funders and communities. It provides a rationale for carrying on working with a community.”*
- 👍 *“I think it's fantastic. It assists – it's not a burden. It isn't dry either – it helps you to be imaginative about the project.”*
- 👍 *“With these types of Neighbourhood Renewal projects the skill base and motivation can be limited. The toolkit does as much as you can reasonably expect to do but it doesn't educate people to change their own views on doing this type of work.”*
- 👍 *“Prove it! has increased my awareness of how the decisions I am making impact on the community. I've as a result of having PI tried harder to see it from the community's viewpoint.”*

👍 *“I’ve offered bits of Prove it! in training to community groups.”*

People gave concrete examples of wanting to use *Prove it!* in future:

👍 *“I want to use the poster for a very contentious project in Dagenham, which is scary.”*

👍 *“We may well use it in a project involving schools. We are keen to use Prove it! again with others.”*

Ease of use

We asked participants at the second workshops what they liked best about *Prove it!* In Leeds, 10 out of 12 people said it was ease of use. Responses in Birmingham and London were more varied, but still concentrated on ease and flexibility.

One person thought it *“practical – far easier to use than any other method”*. Another pilot liked *“The fact that all the questionnaire and data entry was all in one place on the disc. This was helpful. It made good diagrams. We also had a member of staff who could use the Excel spreadsheets. Easy to use.”* A third said that it was *“easier [to use] than it has been in the past”*.

Flexibility

Prove it! has four main elements (the storyboard, the first and second questionnaires and the poster). Table 3 shows how many elements the pilots used.

Table 3: Number of elements used by the pilots

Number of elements	Number of pilots using that many elements
4	2
3	3
2	13
1	9
Total:	27

The average of two elements per pilot would have been a bit higher but for the timing difficulties mentioned above. But the important point is that the pilots could pick and choose what was appropriate for them:

👍 *“I liked the storyboard as it was useful to involve the partners. It was not suitable for the local community as at that stage it might have been seen as a step backwards.”*

👍 *“The student who helped with the second round found the questionnaires a good way to get the community to open up about other issues not directly related to the community garden and it has influenced other work around the promotion of the centre and its activities.”*

👍 *“Poster session went well. For the rest: We didn’t use Storyboard or the Questionnaire. We have been working with a small group, and these other methods would not have been suitable or useful.”*

👍 *“When they started using the timeline we couldn’t stop people chipping in. We were really encouraged by the response.”*

They also adapted the individual elements.

- 👍 *“It was more effective to keep [the questionnaire] simple, so we omitted, for example, the questions about ‘who to go to if you need help...’. For many it was difficult for them to see the point of questions like these.”*

Not everything worked.

- 👎 *“The community group did use it [the poster] for a tapestry project. They had limited success because it was hard to get participants back three months after the end of the project.”*

It helped with community participation.

- 👍 *“The evaluation benefited from being done using Prove it! It helped me to work with residents which is one of the main things we were trying to do in the project.”*
- 👍 *“It enabled us to constantly keep on track. It would have been easy to avoid the consultation otherwise. It was good for keeping people ‘on board’.”*

Capturing the effect on social capital

We asked at the training whether people thought that *Prove it!* helped them to capture the impact their project was having on social capital. Three-quarters said yes.

Table 4: Capturing the impact on social capital

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Number saying 'Yes'</i>	<i>Number saying 'No'</i>	<i>Other – e.g. not sure</i>
Leeds	12	9	0	3 (a)
Birmingham	6	3	0	3 (b)
London	6	6	0	0
Total	24	18	0	6

Note:

(a) Comments were 'Not yet', 'I think it will' and 'Impact will be clearer after the second set of questionnaires'.

(b) Not everyone had used *Prove it!*

Appendices 2 and 3 show how two different pilots reported on the effect their project had on social capital. Appendix 3 uses the graphs that are part of the toolkit.

Two comments in particular illustrate how *Prove it!* can help both project staff and the community to think about the effects projects have on people.

- 👍 *"All four people who returned the secondary questionnaire suggested other areas that they would like to work towards improving. This could suggest that for a small number of people the Cricket Gates project has increased their interest in their local environment. Since completion of the project there have been no incidences of vandalism or littering the site. This could suggest that the project has gone some way toward increasing pride in the local environment."*
- 👍 *"Prove it! got them [the community group] thinking and asking about social capital – they hadn't done that before."*

Views of how easy it is to work with the notion of social capital were divided:

- 👍 *"The community does understand the concept of social capital, and they can see the steps and the results in those terms."*
- 👎 *"When you are asking the questions on the questionnaire, people find it hard to make the link between trees and trust. Even people on the training found this difficult."*

Where does *Prove it!* work best?

Comments from pilots on where it works best:

- 👍 *"[[It's] something where people can see a change, and there has to be a before and after, within a time-frame."*
- 👍 *"The poster means that people do not have to have been involved throughout the whole project."*
- 👍 *"Works best with projects that have a clear aim, a clear start and a clear finish. Harder with bigger projects."*
- 👍 *"Although the residents would have been involved in the project anyway the Questionnaire helped them feel that they were getting more out of it."*
- 👍 *"Good for longer-term projects because we can track progress over time, e.g. development of the community group itself over a number of different projects."*

However:

- 👎 *"The XYZ project was probably too small to be able to see the social capital impacts."*

Factors that affect how well *Prove it!* will work

Three of the five pilots that didn't use *Prove it!* said it was due to delay in the project; the other two cases said it was because of changes in personnel.

Where *Prove it!* was used, the most important factor seemed to be the state of the community group involved in the project:

- 👍 “[It works best] where you already have a good trusting relationship with the group. This project was physical changes and the group's development: we were able to look at process as well as impact.”
- 👍 “There are some situations where it would work – it depends on the community group – probably best where there is already a formal organisation. Some people react positively to the professional approach. On these occasions the storyboard will encourage ownership. You've got to know your audience.”

The skills, confidence and experience of the staff member are also important.

- 👍 “We need to help people step out of the box and be flexible. You need to be brave to ask a group of adults to stand in a line according to how they feel.”
- 👍 “Next time will be easier. However good the training, in the end you learn by doing it.”
- 👍 “Some project participants were sceptical about the value of this type of evaluation and having now completed my first *Prove It* evaluation I feel that I would be more prepared to counteract these views and promote the value of the process.”
- 👍 “You would expect the facilitation skills to be available in a [Groundwork] trust, and so these [the workshop elements] are the bits that are easier for a Groundwork to deliver. They are less likely to have the inherent research (or Excel skills) in the trust for the questionnaire bit to be used to full advantage.”

How can *Prove it!* be improved?

We also asked what people would change. In Leeds, seven out of twelve said nothing. The five who did comment had some suggestions:

- Make the graphs more accurate.
- Get people in funding organisations to take note.
- Integrate it with other consultation (e.g. site use/future use) and customer satisfaction.
- Standardise the procedure to gain validity.
- Make questionnaires more in line with Basic Skills in case people are filling them in themselves.

In Birmingham and London, people concentrated on technical questions, for example, ‘make it easier to alter the questionnaire’. This has been done. The exception was a comment that the toolkit was written for outsiders rather than community members.

Are the results likely to be used?

The people who came to the second training course told us what they were going to do with the results.

Table 5: Using the results

	<i>Leeds</i>	<i>Birmingham</i>	<i>London</i>	<i>Total</i>
Number of people giving their views:	12	6	6 (a)	24
Number of people agreeing with statement:				
Statements:				
I'll share them with the community.	11	5	4	20
I'll discuss them with my line manager.	9	3	4	16
I'll use them as part of future funding proposals.	7	4	5	16
I'll submit them to nef .	7	1	3	11
I'll use them for a press release.	7	1	1	9
I'll use them as part of our Annual Report.	2	0	1	3
I need them for my job appraisal.	1	1	0	2
Reporting to funders and partners.	3 (b)	0	0	
			Total	77

Comment [01]: Missing the B note

Notes

(a) While eleven people attended, five people didn't return their forms

Even allowing for wishful thinking, the fact that each person proposed an average of more than three uses for the results suggests that they are likely to be used, rather than being completed and immediately forgotten. We are pleased to note that the community is seen as such an important audience.

Summary

Tables 6 and 7 pull together the features of *Prove it!* and our evaluation of the pilots to show the types of evaluation for which *Prove it!* is and is not suited.

Table 5: Types of evaluation for which *Prove it!* is not suited

Feature	Makes it unsuitable for
Participative	Summative evaluation. It is unlikely that <i>Prove it!</i> would meet the accepted standards of the discipline as a summative evaluation. The steps required to conduct a summative evaluation are more involved and complex and require full support of expert evaluators and/or basic understanding of statistics and research methods.
Participative	Evaluating an entire programme, where the participation of all concerned is much harder than with an individual project.
Flexibility	Each project will develop its own story, so it is more challenging to compare results from one project to the other.

Table 6: Types of evaluation for which *Prove it!* is suited

Feature	Makes it suitable for
Participative	Formative evaluation. Those who are doing the project and so wish to learn how to do it better during the course of the project will be involved in the evaluation.
Flexibility	The applications of this toolkit extend beyond those of Barclays' SiteSavers projects. The toolkit can be easily adapted to different projects.
Emphasis on social capital	This not only captures the effects of projects on the community; it also encourages those who are developing projects to think about and plan these effects in advance.
Flexibility	The toolkit could be used to evaluate not only social capital but also capacity building, social exclusion, fear of crime, sustainability, and other quality of life issues.
Ability to collect both qualitative and quantitative data.	<i>Prove it!</i> can provide a comprehensive story of a project: its context; how it was implemented; its outputs and outcomes; and how they were reached.
Storyboard	Evaluation can now be easily embedded in project management systems.

Conclusions

1: *Prove it!* works best for small-scale community involvement projects.

Prove it! is participative, flexible and acknowledges the importance of social capital. These features, as outlined in Table 6, suggest that *Prove it!* works best for smaller projects that have community involvement. Community involvement means in particular that there is a group of people quite intensively involved in planning, carrying out and reviewing the work that has been done.

Conversely, *Prove it!* is unlikely to work well for large projects, programmes and those projects where there is little or no community involvement.

2: *Prove it!* works best for formative rather than summative evaluation.

If you struggle to remember the difference, recall the example cited earlier: 'When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative; when the guests taste the soup, that's summative.' The fact that it is participative means that those who most need and want to learn how a project is doing, and so to improve it, will be able to do so. Conversely, this makes it harder to assemble a representative sample.

Both the emphasis on social capital and the combination of quantitative and qualitative data help in telling the story of the project, which is essential to formative evaluation. Conversely again, the flexibility that is a strength in formative evaluation is a weakness in summative evaluation, making it less likely that different projects will produce comparable results.

3: *Prove it!* supports the direction that regeneration and evaluation policy is taking.

To give a few examples:

- There is widespread recognition among policymakers that evaluation is failing to involve local people. *Prove it!* can do that.
- The Community Fund has recognised the need to build 'evaluation capacity' and has commissioned Charities Evaluation to provide long term ongoing evaluation support to organisations receiving Lottery funding. The nature of *Prove it!* as a toolkit gives it great potential in building capacity.
- The Home Office, the National Statistics Bureau and Groundwork are working on a set of social capital, capacity building, sustainability and quality of life indicators. A major gap in this field is the need to put these indicators into context. *Prove it!* can do that.
- There is increased emphasis not only on outcomes but also on outcome based funding. One pilot said "*We used Prove It because we had signed up to it on the understanding that the outcome side is becoming more important to us (and to Groundwork).*" *Prove it!* helps people to define and measure their outcomes.

4: *Prove it!* can help in measuring social capital

Social capital can be defined as the "networks, norms, relationships, values and informal sanctions that shape the quantity and co-operative quality of a society's social interactions."¹⁰ It is clear from this that social capital has a qualitative element. It also has a quantitative element, implied by the word 'capital'. *Prove it!*

¹⁰ The PIU report "Social Capital – A Discussion Paper, April 2002" can be downloaded at <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/su/social%20capital/socialcapital.pdf>

can help with both aspects. In particular, the narrative aspects (the story) of how projects make change are vital in understanding the qualitative side of social capital.

5: All evaluation methods, including *Prove it!*, need the right circumstances to flourish

There are several circumstances that we have already pointed to:

- The appropriate type of project.
- The appropriate type of evaluation.
- The existence of a well-established community group.

The circumstance that we have not yet emphasized is the culture of the host organisation. It may be, as one pilot said, that “*The poster encourages reflection in a culture of rushing on.*” However, *Prove it!* is still going against the grain in an organisation like Groundwork. **nef** summarises the position of practitioners in a October 2001 report, *Prove it! The feasibility report, Shifting to evidence based renewal*:

“The major practical challenge with neighbourhood renewal is spending money sufficiently quickly. Schemes more often than not start late and fall further behind over time. February and March of each financial year sees a frenzy of activity to spend money. Once the money is allocated there is considerable pressure on practitioners to get the projects implemented. As a result there is little time to think about evaluation which is vital to ensuring that delivery has the right impact but which in the short term can get in the way of delivery.”

The lessons from this are two-fold:

1. While we recommend that other organizations use and encourage *Prove it!* (for the right type of project and evaluation), we ask them to accept that it will take time and effort to embed it.
2. How well it works will depend on:
 - Checking in individual cases that the appropriate circumstances are in place.
 - Not forcing projects to use *Prove it!*
 - Making the effort to put those circumstances in place wherever possible.

Appendix 1

Prove it! Follow-up Interview Protocol June 2004

Name of individual: _____ Date: _____

Name of Trust etc. _____

1. Use of *Prove it!*

a) How far did you get?

We should ask them how far they got and then generally why they only got as far as they did. Then go into specific factors, as below.

b) Did you or your Trust/organisation use *Prove it!* for more or fewer projects than you originally envisaged? Why was that? If more, what were the projects?

2. Encouraging factors

a) What factors encouraged you?

See what people say unprompted. When they have finished, run through the list below to see if any apply.

1. External to *Prove it!* (e.g. money)

2. Internal

- Ease of use
- Capturing impact
- Capturing impact on social capital
- Helping implementation
- Having uses for the results

b) Which of the encouraging factors could be enhanced?

3. Obstacles

a) What were the difficulties?

See what people say unprompted. Ask what the effect of each difficulty was. When they have finished, run through the list below to see if any apply.

- Time pressure
- Staff changes
- Problems with the relevant community group
- Lack of experience/training in participative working
- Timing difficulties (e.g. deciding when to do the second questionnaire)
- Linking physical changes with social capital
- Training times didn't fit with the rhythm of the project
- Communication difficulties with **nef** (e.g. didn't receive emails)
- Problems with the toolkit

b) Which of these difficulties could be removed or reduced, and how?

4. What sort of project does *Prove it!* work best for?

5. What do you think the alternatives to *Prove it!* are?

6. Use of results

Tick boxes as appropriate	Have done	Will do
Share them with the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discuss them with my line manager.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use them as part of future funding proposals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Submit them to nef .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use them for a press release.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use them as part of our Annual Report.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
For my job appraisal.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Has *Prove it!* helped you to capture the impact of your project on social capital? (Ask for details.)

8. The future

- a) Do you and your Trust/organisation intend to use *Prove it!* in future?
- b) If so, how?
- c) What would encourage greater take up in future?

See what people say unprompted. When they have finished, run through the list below to check which apply.

- Training the trainers
 - Using the trainers for further training within their Trusts (or equivalent), also inviting community groups
 - Trying to get project managers and their line managers to come on training together
 - Including or linking to training on how to run participative workshops
 - Making a video
 - Providing regular emails about new things on the website that act as reminders to use it
- d) What do you think of having the storyboard and poster as a minimum, with the other tools as an add on?

9. The website

- a) Have you joined the *Prove it!* Website at: <http://greenspace.net.countryside.gov.uk> ?
- b) If you haven't already input Secondary Data, when will you be able to do so?

10. For those who didn't complete a *Prove it!* Survey:

- a) What did *Prove it!* contribute to the quality of participation / Stakeholder Involvement in your project?
- b) What did *Prove it!* contribute to the quality of the story you are telling of the project?

Appendix 2

Extract from *Prove it! Project Evaluation Report for The Horn Park Community and Nature Garden and Community Growing Plots* by Denise Culley, Groundwork Thames Gateway London South.

2. Horn Park Community and Nature Garden Project Background

This project, started in March 2003, aimed to create a nature garden and a community food growing area on an underused allotment site on a housing estate in the London Borough of Greenwich.

A number of plots on the Gavestone Allotment sites had been redundant for some time and therefore the society members decided that they would like to transform two plots into a nature garden and two plots into a community food growing area. The Society approached Horn Park Community Centre who in turn approached Groundwork TGLS to help source funding and to lead on the development and the management of the proposed project.

Groundwork managed to access funding from both Barclays' Sitesavers and the Community Fund Environments for Everyone Programme to develop and deliver this project. Delivery of the project officially began in May 2003.

5. Summary of Findings

Has this Horn Park Community Project managed to build social capital amongst the community? A difficult question to answer but based on the findings, it can be concluded that the results of the after project surveys were significantly more positive than those of the before surveys.

All participants agreed that the allotment site was now more attractive and had held conversations with many new and different people as a result of their involvement in the project. There was an increase in the number of participants who trusted their local council to work in their best interests and more participants felt that they could improve things in the local area.

Surprisingly however, one third of participants felt that local crime had increased over the past year and the amount that project participants used the site had not significantly increased.

Because of the small survey sample, I feel that firm conclusions on whether social capital has been built within the whole community cannot be drawn from this evaluation. However what can be drawn from the results from the surveys and the poster evaluation session is that the steering group members have benefited from participating in this project. They have gained valuable experience, met new people and built and maintained good links with local partner agencies such as the ILPS, Groundwork and local businesses.

Just as valuable is the fact that as a result of this project, Horn Park now has a new facility, one that will be of benefit to both the local community and local wildlife.

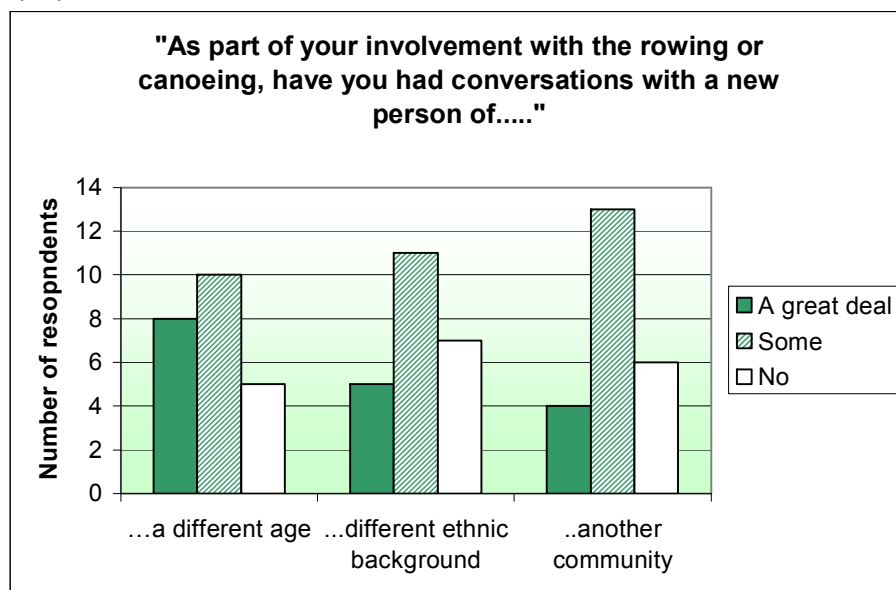
Appendix 3

Extract from a report on the Orthodox Jewish Boys Rowing and Canoeing Pilot Programme at Springhill, Hackney, London, compiled and written by Anita Wilkins (LWP East Zone Community Projects Manager) and Lea Rivers (Trust Waterway Citizens Officer).

3.6 Social capital benefits

As stated at the start of this report, although an increase in social capital and trust between the various communities at Springhill was not an explicit aim of the pilot programme, any progress towards this ideal brought about by the project is likely to assist the wider regeneration effort. The charts on this page and the next show the responses to five questions that were based around *Prove it!* statements regarding levels of trust and interaction.

Firstly the chart below illustrates the number of conversations that respondents claim to have had with new people.



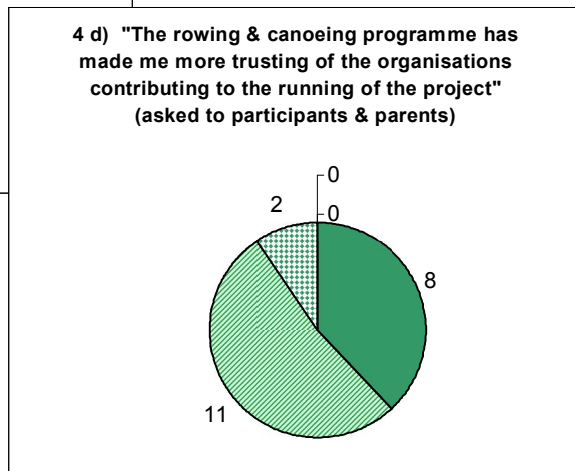
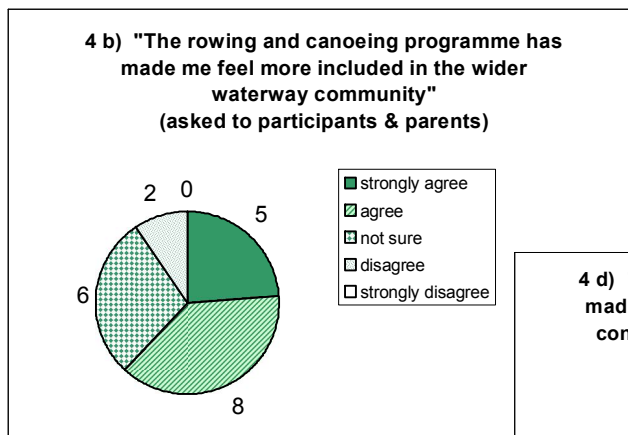
There has clearly been a great deal of interaction, especially between different age groups – most probably due to the new relationships between instructors and the boys participating in rowing and canoeing. However 7 of those who had conversations with people of a different age were parents, so the interaction effects seem to have gone beyond the immediacy of the rowing and canoeing instruction. As one instructor commented in response to question 9 (what do you value most?): *“Opportunity for communities to meet & experience the local amenities – the river. I spoke to many parents who enjoyed being around the place & seeing their sons on the water.”*

The benefits of such interactions were recognised and commented upon by one parent: *“The exposure to different people – outside of the community and new experiences all help to form well rounded children and adults of the future”*

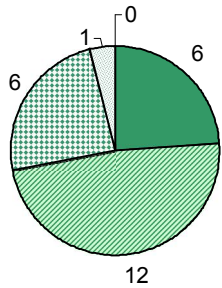
Following along this theme, the charts on the next page clearly suggest that the rowing and canoeing brought about a positive boost to perceptions of inclusion and trust within both participants’ families and organisers of the programme. Especially dramatic is the response to 4 d); over 90% of the respondents to this statement agreed that the programme had made them more trusting of the organisations involved in the running of the rowing and canoeing.

The bar chart at the bottom of the following page backs up these findings, with the suggestion that Jewish families have become more aware of most of these waterway agencies throughout the project. This chart also highlights the relative prominence that the Lea Rowing Club seems to hold within the Orthodox Jewish community, although the surprising lack of recognition of Leaside Young Mariners may be because this organisation is known more commonly as the Leaside Canoe Centre.

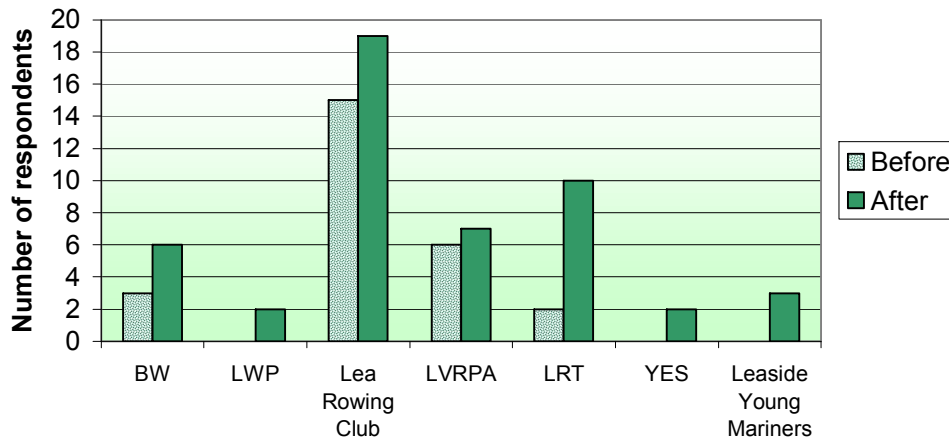
It can be concluded from these results that the sporting clubs and their activities are providing a key link between the Orthodox Jewish families and the wider waterway community – a link that could perhaps be utilised and built upon in the future. Moreover the boost to levels of trust within the wider community can only help to reduce the negative impact that fear of crime has on the Jewish community’s enjoyment of their environment.



"The rowing & canoeing programme has made me more trusting of people from other communities"
 (asked to participants, parents & instructors)



"Which of the following organisations were you aware of before /after the rowing & canoeing programme?"



BW = British Waterways LWP = London's Waterway Partnership
 LRT = Lea Rivers Trust YES = Youth Experience in Sport
 LVRPA = Lea Valley Regional Park Authority

Appendix 4

Gascoyne Mural Project *Prove it!* report