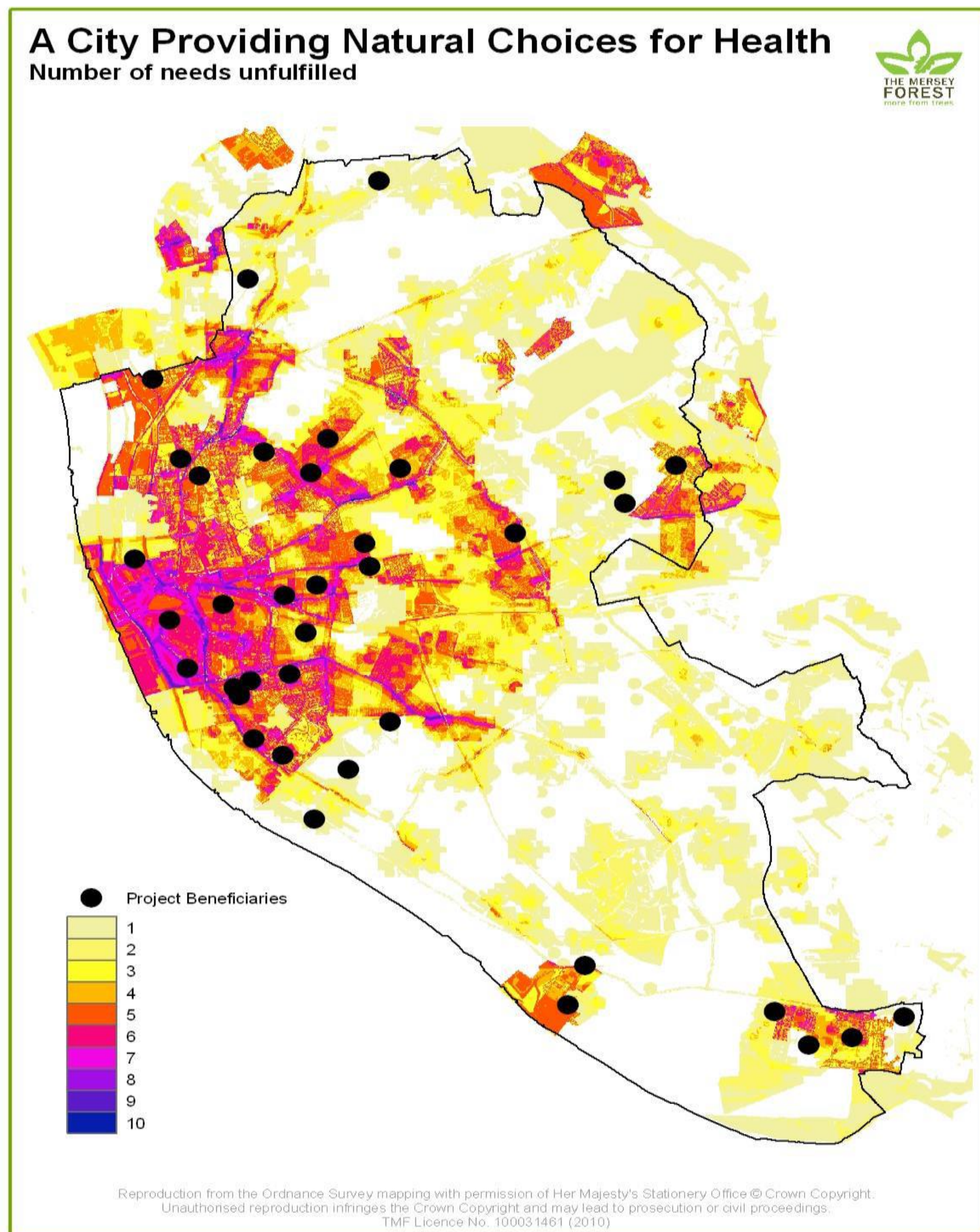


## Green Infrastructure Strategy into action for health

Sarah Dewar- Mersey Care NHS Trust, Clare Olver and Paul Nolan - The Mersey Forest



Map 1 – The darker areas indicate places in Liverpool with the greatest number of health issues. These issues include poor mental health and high incidence of Cardiovascular disease. The black dots show the areas the Natural choice beneficiaries lived. This shows the close relationship between need and targeting of resources through the project.

We suggest that this a key benefit of green infrastructure planning and the collaborative work between health professionals and planning.

## Natural Choices Programme

Investment of approximately £300,000 by the Liverpool PCT enabled 38 groups across the city to deliver projects with their communities.

### Rotunda Edible Community Garden

The work at Rotunda over the year has been to develop an accessible edible community garden for all residents of Kirkdale. Over the summer the community has come together with young and older generations growing and eating together. Young people have been working with people with physical disabilities growing produce and not letting their disability stop them achieving their aims.



## Background

Liverpool's city-wide green infrastructure strategy, prepared by The Mersey Forest on behalf of Liverpool City Council and Liverpool Primary Care Trust, has rapidly spurred action on the ground. The strategy was launched in May 2011, and set out key aims for the city. This included the aspiration for Liverpool to become a city where healthy options were a "natural choice". How could a green infrastructure plan help to create opportunities to improve the poor health statistics of the city?

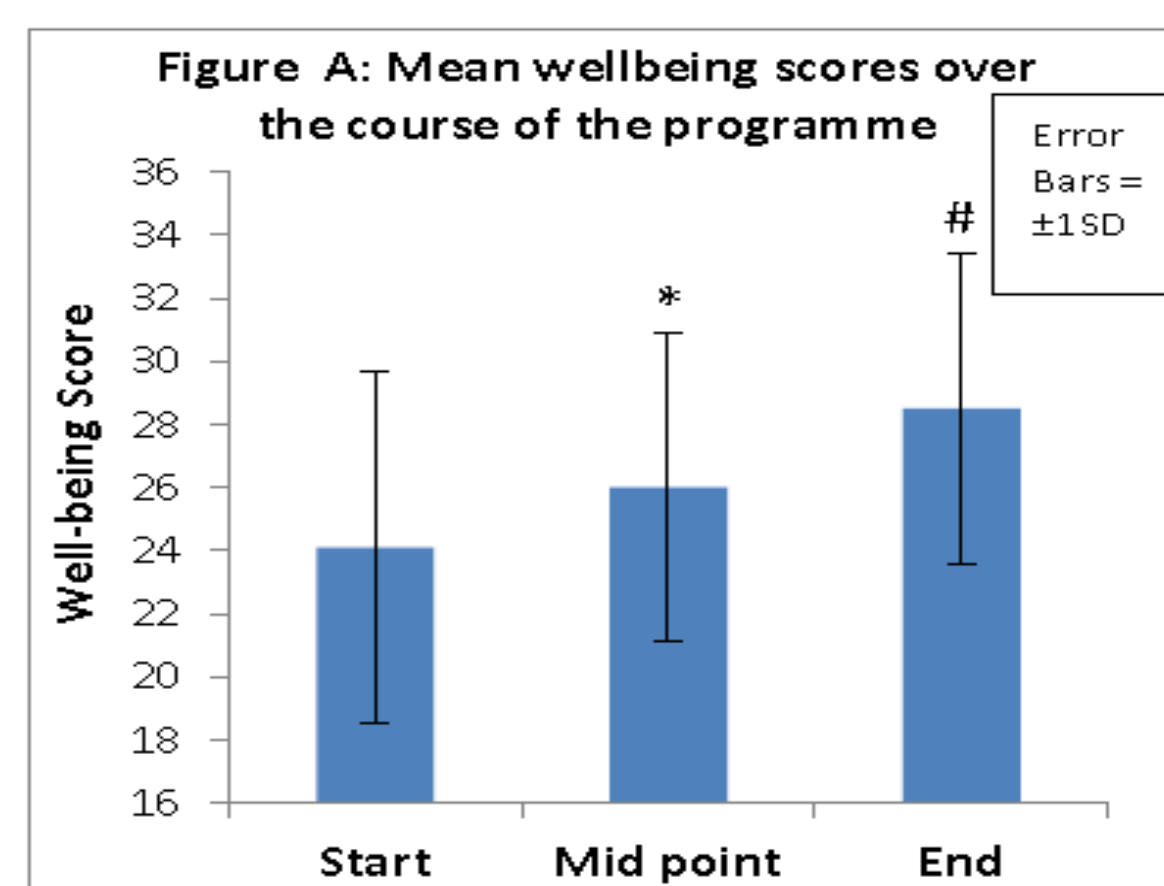
Areas of greatest need for intervention, including interventions that used the natural environment for activity or focus, were identified.

Less than a year later, community groups were delivering related projects through a health and environment programme funded as part of Liverpool's Decade of Health and Wellbeing.

## The Results

Assessment of Wemweb data collected identified that wellbeing improved by 18% from the start to the end of the programme in participants who completed wellbeing cards at three time points and 16% in participants who completed wellbeing cards at the start and end of the programme.

These changes are larger than other wellbeing programmes where 10% improvements have been identified. Furthermore, by the end of the programme participants had 'average' or 'above-average' scores when compared to the mean score for Liverpool residents, highlighting a significant shift from the below average starting scores.



(\*indicates a significant difference between start and midpoint scores ( $P < 0.01$ ), # indicates a significant difference between start and end, and start and midpoint scores ( $P < 0.001$ )).

Overall the programme engaged 3,274 participants in approximately 1,243 different events across Liverpool. The ages of participants ranged from young children to the elderly.

The participants were largely from deprived areas, 51.4% of the projects were located in areas within the 1% most deprived in the UK and a further 21.6% were within areas within the 5% most deprived in the UK.

## What Next?

The challenge now is to work within the new NHS structures to find ways to resource this and similar programmes: Natural Choices is helping to inform and shape the development of a "Natural Health Service" by a range of natural environment based organisations. We see this as a potential mechanism to assist in the wider commissioning of Natural Choices type activity, with triple bottom line benefits - [www.naturalhealthservice.org.uk](http://www.naturalhealthservice.org.uk)