



Volunteers & Green Therapy

Green Nature Therapy

- Lots of evidence for the benefits of Green Therapy to service users & staff -
- Improvements in psychological wellbeing (Muro et al 2023)
- Improvements in physical health (Richardson et al 2013)
- Decreased blood pressure, stress levels and depression (Mitten et al 2018)
- Benefits to NHS & Environment
- Contributes to sustainable NHS
- Positive financial return on investment (Pretty & Barton 2020)
- Reduction in health inequalities, suicide and obesity (Michel & Popham 2008)
- Increased biodiversity
- Bradford –
- The groups least benefiting from green therapy = ethnic minorities and those on low income
- 30% of Bradfords population fall into these categories



The Green Therapy Project

- Aim of the project is to get our service users and staff engaged more with nature
- Do this through several interventions:
- Gardening Groups
- Walking Groups
- Nature Surveys (BioBlitz)
- Nature photography contests
- Nature training for staff
- Nature arts and crafts
- Sessions from other nature organisations (e.g. The Canal Trust)



Volunteer Involvement: Inpatients

- Two inpatient sites – Lynfield Mount (LMH) and Airedale Centre for Mental Health (ACMH)
- At these sites we carry out nature activities with our service users with support from our volunteers –
- LMH – Gardening Group once a week
- LMH – Help with nature crafts (origami)
- ACMH – Art & Craft sessions inspired by nature
- ACMH – Therapy dog visits



Volunteer Involvement: Community

- We have a community allotment owned by the Trust
- Here we take our community service users to do gardening, painting, socialising, music sessions
- Volunteer is an ex-member of staff who has helped facilitate the group for many years
- Continues to do so now as a volunteer
- Already knows the service users and how the group functions



Positives & Negatives

Positives

- Making a real impact to our service users' recovery
- Due to staffing often these groups would struggle to go ahead without
- Bring horticultural expertise staff lack
- Helping to create a Green Pathway from inpatients (ward gardening group) – allotment (inpatients to attend community group close to discharge) – return as volunteer to allotment
- Support from many different professions and areas of the trust – volunteers, estates, occupational therapists, support staff, psychologists, chief exec
- Volunteers are supported by a named volunteer coordinator for that service – can help with working through any challenges

Challenges

- Staffing issues – often no staff to support the groups meaning no service users involvement. This also limits the volunteering opportunities - we have some volunteers who signed up to help with walking groups but have been unable to do so
- Wider communication issues – at the allotment one team accidentally removed everything another team had been growing
- Negative emotional effect of such incidents on volunteers which can lead them to questioning their involvement
- Less volunteer interest in gardening groups
- For growing season volunteers need to have applied a few months in advance to pass the recruitment checks

Hear from a volunteer

“I worked for the Trust before becoming a volunteer and helped set up the gardening group many years ago. When I retired, I wanted to help continue this group as I had seen the huge positive impact it has on our service user's mental health. We have had many barriers over the years including a lack of funding and staff time though the new Green Therapist has helped this. We also had another team destroying what we had spent years growing which was traumatic for myself and the service users, but I continue because I believe in how beneficial the group is”



Hear from a volunteer

“Taking part in activities as part of the nature group allows service users to gain knowledge and learn new skills alongside others. Once the weather improves many of these skills will be gardening based and hopefully these skills can then be used after discharge either at home or as part of a community garden project. I have lived experience of mental health problems and am aware of the positive impact that engaging with nature and feeling part of a community can have. Mental health problems are isolating which presumably for many is then compounded by an inpatient admission. A service user told me during an origami session that he felt good and got a feeling of accomplishment from making something as part of a group where everyone (staff, volunteers, service users) are all engaging in the same task regardless of who they are. I feel like having volunteers helping in these groups helps with this sense of community as volunteers help to bridge the gap between staff and service users especially as with myself may have experience of poor mental health.”

Next Steps

- One aim of project is to offer the same opportunity to everyone across the Trust – can volunteers help achieve that
- Currently working to make the pathway from inpatients – community – return as volunteer easier
- Can we link it more with other charities to participate and volunteering after discharge
- Can we utilise volunteers to make our green activities more cultural relevant and link in with other volunteer activities – eg cooking, arts and crafts, etc.

