

Growing Health: Integration of food growing into the National Health Service



Wiseman¹, T., S. Williams², M. Lennartsson³ M., Devereaux² and U. Schmutz³

¹ University of Brighton, Eastbourne, ² Sustain, London, ³ Garden Organic/CAFS, Coventry
T.J.Wiseman@brighton.ac.uk, sarah@sustainweb.org, uschmutz@gardenorganic.org.uk

Background

There is a long tradition of therapeutic horticulture in occupational therapy practice in the UK. Gardening, and particularly food growing, provides a rich, sustainable and purposeful medium to achieve this. The health, wellbeing and social benefits of gardening, horticulture therapy and food growing are increasingly recognised, and reported in the literature (1-5).

Growing Health: promoting a knowledge partnership for food growing

Growing Health (www.growinghealth.info) is a joint project between Garden Organic and Sustain funded by the Tudor Trust. It has created an active industry advisory board and network of healthcare professionals, academics and representatives of community growing initiatives. It is working to develop a comprehensive UK knowledge partnership to scope and support the potential of food growing as a viable option and a natural part of the health service.

Benefits of gardening and food growing for the NHS

The practice of using food growing to deliver health outcomes can be found in both community and health professional led settings and there are many examples of the UK National Health Service (NHS) and social care commissioning of using food growing to deliver health and wellbeing outcomes. We have published (2) as a 'benefit matrix' documenting the current evidence in the international scientific literature and project evaluations. The evidence shows regular involvement in gardening or community food growing effects physical and mental health by:

Physical health

- Increases overall levels of physical activity and fitness
- Increases healthy fruit and vegetable consumption
- Reduces physical pain, and help with rehabilitation or recovery from surgery
- Helps with physically challenging circumstances, such as cancer, asthma or allergies

Mental health

- Contributes to improved social interactions and community cohesion
- Reduces the occurrence and severity of stress and depression
- Reduces reliance on medication, self-harming behaviour, and visits to psychiatric services
- Alleviates symptoms of dementia and Alzheimer's disease
- Provides beneficial social interaction to tackle drug and alcohol dependency



Opportunities and constraints for food growing to deliver health and wellbeing

Opportunities

- To build on the long history of using gardening as a meaningful occupation as part of occupational therapy
- To develop 'action-based' research to show the cost-effectiveness of this treatment versus other approaches including the development of toolkits to capture the social return on investment and give clear steer on the costs and benefits for public funding bodies.
- To build confidence in practitioners and the health service by promotion, knowledge sharing and training.

Constraints

- Difficulty of comparing gardening and food growing to other types of treatment
- Levels of awareness within the NHS of the benefits of gardening are still relatively low.
- Time, space, knowledge and confidence can all be barriers in using gardening as a routine NHS tool to reduce the social costs of many current health issues.

The three strands of the Growing Health project



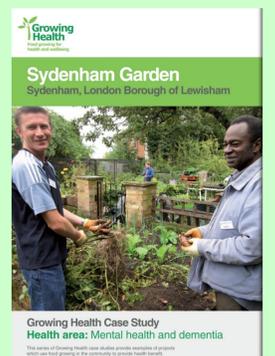
Growing Health - Example Case Studies:

1) Growing Opportunities, Sandwell & the Black Country

- community food growing project targeting people of all ages and backgrounds
- Clients have physical, sensory or learning disability, mental health issues, long-term illness, are carers, elderly or are disadvantaged in multiple ways.
- People are referred to the programme via occupational therapists, physiotherapists, mental health nurses, cardiac nurses, GPs, rehabilitation teams and by self-referral.
- Offer a broad programme and activities that encompass therapeutic horticulture, food growing, cooking and healthy eating as well as other aspects of healthy living from a Public Health approach. Activities are offered through a hands-on outreach programme across the community, as well as from flagship garden sites.

2) Sydenham Garden, Lewisham, London

- Great excellent example of a community garden promoting the physical and mental wellbeing.
- Founded in 2002 by a group of residents including a local general practitioner (GP), converting a neglected nature reserve into a community garden.
- Commissioned by Lewisham NHS with a 3-year contract to provide therapeutic gardening sessions and art therapy for co-workers.
- Typical placement lasts between 12-18 months
- In 2013 received over 170 referrals and held over 70 introductions with potential co-workers.



Publications

A number of publications have been produced to highlight the evidence and examples of how food growing can deliver health and wellbeing outcomes. These include

- review of literature
- case studies of groups working to deliver health benefits
- briefing papers on key health areas including healthy weight and dementia

Want to know more?

Visit our website to find factsheets to support you in your client centred evidence based practice:
www.growinghealth.info

