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Published version deposited in CURVE May 2016

Original citation & hyperlink:

Brown, G. , Bos, E. , Brady, G.M. , Kneafsey, M.R. and Glynn, M. (2016) A summary report of an Evaluation of the Master Gardener Programme at HMP Rye Hill: An Horticultural Intervention with Substance Misusing Offenders. Prison Service Journal, volume 225 (May 2016): 45-51

<http://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/publications/psj/prison-service-journal-225>

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An Evaluation of the Master Gardener Programme at HMP Rye Hill:

A Horticultural Intervention with Substance Misusing Offenders

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Introduction

Prisons are increasingly looking for localised, innovative and collaborative approaches to address rehabilitation and full recovery from substance misuse.¹ This article presents the findings from an evaluation of the Master Gardener (MG) programme, a gardening intervention with substance misuse offenders at HMP Rye Hill.² Whilst the extension of the MG programme to a prison setting recognises a range of positive outcomes associated with the role of horticulture in supporting wellbeing, it also reflects Rye Hill's move towards the development of a dedicated Recovery Unit, offering a suite of interventions to support substance misusing offenders. The MG programme at Rye Hill demonstrates an innovative and successful partnership, working with the charity Garden Organic,³ Public Health Northamptonshire and the Drug and Alcohol Recovery Team (DART), using horticulture as a means to address recovery. This paper sets out the evaluation's aims and objectives, methodological approach, key findings and conclusions which include a number of recommendations. The approach taken has allowed for an examination of the process and experiences from multiple perspectives of the MG programme within a prison setting. As well as focusing on the impacts of the programme, the article reflects on gardening as an embodied practice and the garden as a space that promotes humanisation and self-worth, community, a connection to nature and a longer term, holistic approach to recovery.

Background and context

The Master Gardener Programme (MG programme) at HMP Rye Hill is funded by Public Health England (Northamptonshire) and forms a successful partnership

between the charity Garden Organic and HMP Rye Hill's Drug and Alcohol Recovery Team (DART) (formally the Substance Misuse (SMS) team). The programme is a targeted horticultural intervention situated within the DART services and works with substance misusing offenders.

The Master Gardener Programme at HMP Rye Hill builds on the core Master Gardener Programme. The core Master Gardener programme is a community based mentoring model whereby volunteers are trained by Garden Organic to become 'Master Gardeners' who provide free food growing advice to registered 'households' (local community groups, school and individuals). The evaluation⁴ of the programme demonstrated a number of positive impacts on both volunteers and households participating in the programme. These multidimensional impacts identified are in the (interconnected) areas of 'health and wellbeing'; 'skills base and employability'; 'community life'; 'food eating and buying'; and 'recycling and composting'. The programme, through its personalised mentoring approach offers an additional dimension to the benefits associated with gardening in general.⁵ The MG model has been tailored for delivery at HMP Rye Hill, through a partnership approach in recognition of the benefits associated with food growing and engagement in the programme. Furthermore, it is identified that some core aspects of the model are aligned to components of the Drug Strategy around person-centred approaches, the importance of peer support, and recognising people's personal journeys for example; the strategy also emphasises holistic and person-centred approaches to recovery, based on effective local level action and partnership working.⁶

Horticulture in a prison setting

Despite an ongoing tradition of using horticulture as a form of activity in secure settings, such as prisons, there is limited research evidence documenting its potential benefits and value. Whilst limited, existing research has

1. HM Government (2010) Drug Strategy 2010 Reducing Demand, Restricting Support, Building Recovery: Supporting People to Live a Drug Free Life. London: Home Office.
2. Brown, G., Bos, E., Brady, G., Kneafsey, M., and Glynn, M. (2015) 'An Evaluation of the Master Gardener Programme at Rye Hill Prison: A Gardening Intervention with Substance Misusing Offenders', Coventry University.
3. Garden Organic (2015) Garden Organic (Online) Available from <www.gardenorganic.co.uk> [Accessed on 22nd June 2015].
4. Bos, E. and M. Kneafsey (2014). Evaluation of the Master Gardener Programme, Coventry University, UK.
5. See Davies, G., Devereaux, M., Lennartsson, M., Schmutz, U., and Williams, S. (2014) The benefits of gardening and growing food for health and wellbeing, Garden Organic and Sustain, UK.
6. HM Government (2010) Drug Strategy 2010 Reducing Demand, Restricting Support, Building Recovery: Supporting People to Live a Drug Free Life. London: Home Office.

identified that horticulture plays an important role in the lives of participants and leads to a range of educational, occupational and rehabilitative benefits. Furthermore, engagement facilitates an improvement in relationships between participants and the wider community, leads to the development of life skills and creates a sense of ownership, being outside is found to be a factor in improvements in individual's physical health.⁷ International research provides some additional insights about the use of a similar Master Gardener Programme in a US prison setting. Such benefits include providing: a therapeutic effect; sense of accomplishment; intellectual stimulation; improved communication with fellow offenders; opportunities for learning; increased self-esteem; increased self-control and improved life satisfaction amongst offenders.⁸ This growing body of evidence recognises the type and range of effects this type of programme has in a community and prison setting; it is against this backdrop that the evaluation of the MG programme with substance misusing offenders at HMP Rye Hill is located. Our research provides a unique insight into the delivery of the programme at Rye Hill prison and strong evidence around the outcomes of engagement in horticultural activities.

HMP Rye Hill

HMP Rye Hill is a private G4S training prison, located in Rugby.

At the start of the evaluation the prison was designated as a category 'B' training prison holding 664 sentenced male adults. At the mid-point of the evaluation, Rye Hill was designated as one of eight prisons in England and Wales to undertake a re-roll of its population, a significant change to the prison system under the coalition government. Rye Hill remains a training prison and since spring 2014 acts as a national resource for sentenced male adults who have been convicted of a current or previous sex offence(s) and who have been sentenced to over 4 years and have at least 12 months left to serve on their sentence.⁹

At the start of our evaluation Rye Hill was in the process of introducing a new approach to supporting offenders with substance misuse issues; a key part of this included the development of a recovery wing alongside a wider suite of substance misuse programmes, as part of a

dedicated Recovery Unit. The Recovery Unit aims to provide a safe, secure unit where offenders receive appropriate care from the DART team, who provide psychosocial interventions and support. Moreover, the unit aims to support offenders in developing skills, becoming productive members of society and to ultimately move away from misusing substances. In order to be recruited on to the programme (throughout both phases of the evaluation) offenders were required to pass security clearances, located on the recovery wing, and open and willing to access support.

Methodology

Adopting a mixed method approach drawing on a range of qualitative tools is in recognition that human behaviour is complex and fluid, and there are factors that are often overlooked in research that primarily focuses on uncovering fixed patterns alone. The diversity of offenders in terms of demographic data as well as offences and drugs used informed a flexible approach to appropriately understand the relationship between the MG programme and its impact. As such, the evaluation design focussed on the process, capturing small scale situations, stresses, diversity and variability in terms of the range of perspectives held by participants engaging in the programme and key stakeholders

involved. The evaluation was also informed by a survey administered to staff working at the prison but who had no direct input to the gardening intervention; data was also collected from participant's families in survey form. The inclusion of open ended questions provided valuable complementary data in qualitative form. In addition, the research team carried out an analysis of selected data that is routinely collected by the prison regime (adjudications, earned privilege level, and security categorisation) as well as demographic data collected from participants via a short survey.

Data Collected

The evaluation took place between August 2013 and December 2014, following a two phased approach (Phase 1 and Phase 2). Over the two phases,

... horticulture plays an important role in the lives of participants and leads to a range of educational, occupational and rehabilitative benefits.

7. Grimshaw, R. and King, J. (2003) Horticulture in Secure Settings, Reading: Thrive.

8. Polmoski, R.F, Johnson, K. M., Anderson, J. C, (1997) Prison Inmates Became Master Gardeners, HortTechnology, October- December 7(4): 360-362.

9. HMP Rye Hill (2015) About Rye Hill (Online) Available from www.hmpryehill.org.uk [Accessed on 22nd June 2015].

the team collected a range of data from programme participants and programme related personnel. In total, the team:

- Spent around 152 hours conducting participant observations
- Facilitated 3 focus groups
- Conducted 7 staff interviews
- Collected 50 completed staff feedback forms
- Gathered 58 completed reflective diaries, 46 completed circles of change, 25 demographic surveys
- Analysed 3 portfolios
- Collected 4 family surveys.

The data collected in Phase 1 and Phase 2 used the same methods which yielded similar amounts of data. Ethical approval was obtained prior to the research, and the team spoke at length to participants about the study and written consent was obtained from all participants.

Evaluation participants

As the decision to 're-roll' the population at Rye Hill took place six months into the evaluation, Phase 1 was conducted with offenders from the general population and Phase 2 (after the re-roll) with the new prison population. Equally, the evaluation engaged with each of the groups for a period of 6 months. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire containing questions about certain socio-economic characteristics. In total, 11 participants in Phase 1 completed the questionnaire and 14 participants in Phase 2, generating demographic data from 25 participants overall. Phase 1 participants were a diverse group in terms of age; from the time spent with participants, we can also see that the group differed in terms of offence committed, number of times they had been imprisoned, length of sentence and type of sentence. Phase 1 participants all reported having substance misusing issues and were not deemed to have committed a sexual offence. Whilst this varied, participants in Phase 2 were all imprisoned for having committed a sexual related offence. Similarly to the offenders in Phase 1, there were variations in this group related to age, offence, substance misused, and length of service; however there was more diversity in terms of ethnicity and religion. A noticeable difference with Phase 2 participants was the increased number who reported having a mental health need. At the time of conducting the field work in Phase 2 at least three participants were being monitored by staff as they were perceived to be at risk of 'self-harming' or suicide.

Data analysis

Analysis of the qualitative data was undertaken using a system of coding informed by the key aims of the project. Themes from the empirical data were generated using a grounded theory 'style'.^{10,11} The analytical software tool 'NVivo10' was used to organise and analyse all of the qualitative data, accessed by two of the research team. Quantitative data that is routinely collected as part of the prison management regime, and survey data collected from staff and participant's families was analysed using the quantitative analytical package SPSS (v22).

Key Findings

The following sections demonstrate the multiple ways in which the MG programme is understood as having an impact on participants and the delivery of the programme in a prison setting. The data is organised under five key areas: an environment that supports recovery, health and wellbeing, a recovery community, opportunities for learning and moving the programme to a prison setting. It is important not to ignore the inter connection between each of these areas and how they are all implicated in creating an environment amenable to supporting offenders with a substance misuse issue on their recovery journey.



Building an environment that supports recovery

A key finding from the evaluation is the relationship between the environment and recovery. Overwhelmingly, the data identifies the significance of working in the garden to participants' recovery journey. Participants reported that having access to a space in which they feel

10. Glaser, B., and Strauss, A. (1967) The discovery of grounded theory. Chicago: Aldine.

11. Strauss A.C., and Corbin, J.M., (1990) Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques, London: Sage.

a sense of freedom and autonomy and able to access support is important.

I find the whole experience extremely positive and helpful in lots of ways. The most prominent factor is the freedom. It's fantastic for me to get off the wing; it feels to me as though I'm working outside of jail. (Phase 1).

Being outside gives participants an opportunity to engage in purposeful activity. Participants shared information related to all stages of the growing process such as; decisions about selection of seeds for planting, germinating, replanting and tending and cultivating. What was also of importance to participants was that having carried out all this work, they were allowed to harvest and eat the fruits and vegetables:

I was at a dark point the other week, killing myself was the only thing if I didn't have the garden and my mates. It's not the garden [that's the issue], it's the wing. (Phase 2).

Capturing the extent to which MG programme has led to a reduction in substance misuse is complex and reflects the diversity associated with the participants. A common feeling reported was how being in the garden has led participants to make changes to their substance misusing behaviour. As participants tend to be at different stages of their recovery it is important to view recovery as an iterative rather than a linear journey. Participants reported being abstinent and drug free, those who had made adjustment and reduced the quantity of drugs taken, (this was both prescribed medication like methadone or illegal substances), replaced a substance they abused with something they viewed to be less addictive and/ or harmful or who were at the very early stages and still misusing drugs but accessing support; being on the garden was perceived as a first step on the recovery journey. Participants spoke in various ways about the impact of the MG programme on substance misuse behaviour.

Since I joined the garden project it has led to me getting clean from drugs. (Phase 1).

The garden is looking a bit better; there is a change in myself where I'm not taking nowhere near as much drugs as I was. (Phase 2).

Completing consecutive drug — free tests which has benefited on my health. (Phase 1).

Often wanting to use drugs but stay calm on a day to day basis. (Phase 1).

Building Health and Wellbeing

A key theme identified in the data related to how engagement in the MG programme has a positive impact on participants' health and subjective sense of wellbeing. This encompasses a range of factors which include issues associated with health care provision, ill health, health experiences and issues specifically related to substance misuse. Recurring themes were apparent in relation to physical health related to issues associated with sleep, diet, fitness. Participants identified how engaging in the MG programme offered an opportunity to get involved in work requiring varying amounts of physical activity. Engaging in this physical activity contributed to participants reporting improvement in their appetite and health benefits from an improvement in their daily diet:

Improvement in my eating habit. (Phase 1).

Healthy and putting on weight. (Phase 1).

Participants reported how from the start of their time on the programme, they noticed the positive impacts on their mental health and sense of wellbeing. Their time in the garden as demonstrated in the next section gave them access to a therapeutic environment, conducive to their recovery.

It's a great emotional journey for me as someone who has a number of underlying mental health issues its had a great impact on me this week so far has been no exception with some new issues going on its helped me not to explode. (Phase 2).

Since I've been on the gardens I feel better in myself and have been a lot happier. (Phase 1).

Asking for advice instead of bottling it up — more relaxed confident, stress free. More

A key theme identified in the data related to how engagement in the MG programme has a positive impact on participants' health and subjective sense of wellbeing.

myself, I open up a lot more about how I feel.
(Phase 2).

Staff also reported the MG programme as having a positive impact on participants' health and mental wellbeing.

The prisoners are quieter than they were — calmer and less rowdy or boisterous. One prisoner has demonstrated improved communication skills. Some have even apologised for their behaviour, demonstrating reflection and remorse which was not apparent before. One person has really 'come out of his shell'. One prisoner is talking more now instead of bottling things up and hurting himself. He's working hard and sleeping. (Phase 1).

Overwhelmingly, participants spoke about how the MG programme creates opportunities for them to engage in physical activity, mental relaxation and stimulation leading to positive health and wellbeing outcomes.

Building a recovery Master Gardener community

Bringing people together to share a vision and goal around development of the garden offers an opportunity to gain a sense of purpose. Our data shows a relationship between development of the garden and participant's self-perception, confidence and motivation.

I have more self-confidence. I know I have something to lose...it gives me something to talk about on visits with my family. (Phase 1).

Getting positive feedback — told that I am doing a good job. People listen. Our complaints being acknowledged. (Phase 2).

The MG programme encouraged participants to work together, support each other and to share ideas, views and experiences (in the widest sense). Building a sense of community was not solely amongst the participants but also extended to staff working on the programme.

Everyone has been turning up so a lot more work has been done and the garden is starting to take shape. (Phase 1).

I'm gradually getting used to working with others, I would not have done this before as I'm very much a loner. (Phase 2).

The project helps us to integrate more with others, always someone to talk to. (Phase 2).

Building Opportunities for learning

Engagement in the MG programme allows participants to gain new skills or develop and apply existing skills. In doing so, this promotes opportunities for informal peer learning, peer support and mentoring. The ethos of the garden project is fundamental in creating the positive space. Sharing responsibility of developing the garden at all stages was important in motivating participants to engage with the programme and to sustain their interest. The garden staff actively encouraged participants to take ownership of the garden facilitated their engagement and led to them initiating ideas for developing the space, utilising various skills (including planning, designing, costing, learning about the material needed) and how to carry out relevant tasks. The aspect of group working is emphasised and the ability to see progression and development is a key strength of this type of activity, not only contributing towards motivation but also an interactive and evolving environment.

the whole experience of designing our garden and seeing the progression we are making.
(Phase 1).

Working as a team, mainly with [name] as since working with him, we've actually achieved quite a bit together. (Phase 1).

This is alongside skills that can be transferred to the world of work on release from prison.

I know when I get out, I know I can take a patch of garden or I can go to an allotment and make myself a nice garden, and I can do it with my daughter. (Phase 1).

Engagement in the programme allows for the development of a constructive environment by allowing participants to gain new skills or develop and put to use existing skills. The type of activity also promotes the opportunity for informal peer mentoring in terms of hard and soft skills, and to use the activity to aid their recovery, including thinking about their release. Most of the participants could see an opportunity to be able to use the skills they had learnt on the garden in the future. The creation of common values, group working, and a shared responsibility helps in fostering a therapeutic and supporting environment and encourages the development of skills and mentoring as well as a sense of achievement.

Moving the MG programme to a prison setting

The journey to recovery by participants is not without its challenges. The vision for the DART at HMP Rye Hill

involves developing a comprehensive and holistic support mechanism that wraps around individual offenders. Consequently the wider context in which the MG programme takes place is important; we indicate key factors to be considered when locating a community project in this secure setting. It is important to recognise how the MG programme is impacted by working practices and decisions taken outside the direct control of Garden Organic and as such the following factors are essential to the delivery of the programme:

- Partnership working
- Setting up
- Recruitment of participants
- Working with offenders in a prison setting
- Moving forward

Partnership working

The importance of partnership working within the criminal justice system is long established in policy. This reflects recognition that offenders face complex and multiple needs that require a multi-agency response. The expansion of court ordered drug treatment sanctions and a renewed focus on recovery and rehabilitation underlines the continued need for partnership across statutory and third sector agencies. Moreover, this is reiterated in the current Drug Strategy which calls for ‘an ‘integrated approach’ to substance misuse treatment and better continuity of case management between prison and community.¹²

There are specific issues that need to be considered in relation to positive partnership working specifically in circumstances in which the partnership arrangements are across sectors where partners bring different organisational cultures, priorities, and resources to the partnership. This is not to suggest that such partnerships cannot work effectively, but acknowledging the effort, time and adaptability required to establish and sustain strong partnership working is of particular importance in a prison setting, which often presents challenging circumstances.

Setting up

The iterative evaluation process supported on-going learning and a space for reflective learning, which helped

to facilitate positive developments in partnership working. Learning from the evaluation can be summarised by the following points:

- Time is required for establishing parameters of partnership working
- Understanding rules, regulation and constraints encountered when working in a prison setting
- Communicating with key personnel within the prison, but also sharing plans widely with prison staff about the programme
- Time to ensure staff go through security procedures
- Ensuring resources are in place
- Importance of a shared responsibility for the programme

- Consideration of how to ensure the MG programme is integrated into the wider prison strategy for substance misuse
- Management of partnership processes
- Training opportunities for all Substance Misuse Staff which includes time set aside outside of the work environment for team building and sharing of ideas
- Promoting the MG programme with potential participants

Recruitment of participants

Having a clear, transparent and robust recruitment process is important for both participants and staff. Factors such as environment, sense of community, individuals’ willingness to engage,

access support and provide support to others all contribute to individuals’ recovery journey. As such, it is essential that participants recruited to the MG programme are clear about the aim and objectives of the programme, expectations of staff and their peers already on the programme and, more importantly, have made a conscious decision to embark on a recovery journey.

Working with offenders in a prison setting

Offenders represent one of the most socially excluded groups and there are often a number of challenges encountered in terms of encouraging their access and engagement with services and initiatives.¹³ There is increasing interest in improving the ‘quality’ of the relationship between the therapist and substance misusing ‘client’ as a key method of ensuring

The expansion of court ordered drug treatment sanctions and a renewed focus on recovery and rehabilitation underlines the continued need for partnership across statutory and third sector agencies.

12. Kirby, A., McSweeney, Turnbull, T., and Bhardwa, B., Engaging substance misusing offenders: A rapid review of the substance misuse treatment literature (2011), London: Institute for Criminal Policy Research.
 13. Improving Access to Psychology Therapies (IAPT) (2013) Offenders, Positive Practice Guide, NHS.

engagement and sustaining retention in treatment long enough for the client to derive benefit and facilitate behaviour change. It is acknowledged that there is a lack of research on effective strategies for sustaining relationships beyond the initial engagement stage. Whilst recognising that staff delivering the programme are not professional therapists, it is possible to view their relationships with participants as a 'therapeutic alliance' which are based on a relationship of trust and mutual respect in which participants are willing to share their experiences and talk about their substance misusing behaviour alongside other health and wellbeing issues'.¹⁴ As such, the importance of positive working relationships between staff and participants is also an important aspect of participants' recovery journey. Motivation and readiness to change are factors that need to be considered in relation to the quality of the relationship between staff and participants.

Moving forward with the Master Gardener Programme

The changes to the MG programme over the period of the evaluation were in response to a number of factors; adapting the MG programme to a prison environment; practicalities associated with delivering a gardening intervention; responding to the needs of participants; staff introducing or adapting activities in light of learning uncovered, and staff delivering the programme seeking new ways to move the programme forward. There is much potential to innovate and extend the parameters of the MG programme. Moving forward and widening the activities has created new learning opportunities for participants, the prospect of expanding the activities, and introducing new and innovative ideas. The possibility of the programme to generate an income that supports its delivery may be important for its future development and sustainability. In moving forward what has become clear is how the MG programme sits readily within the wider strategic goal to address substance misuse at Rye Hill prison and increasingly forms an important part of the wider work planned and being delivered as part of establishing a recovery unit. What is evident in the data is the willingness of all parties — Garden Organic, DART team and G4S to build on the unique approach the MG programme offers to working with this prison population.

Adopting a multi-method approach and conducting the evaluation over a 12 month period generated a wealth of data that enabled a valuable insight about the multi-dimensional experiences of engaging with the MG programme. Participants were keen to be part of the evaluation and candidly shared their views and experiences about the MG programme with the research team. Overwhelmingly, participants reported a range of positive factors about their engagement in the MG programme and a myriad of ways they perceive the programme as contributing to their recovery journey and wanting to make wider behavioural changes both in and outside prison. As such, this contributes towards meeting a range of outcomes in the drug strategy around improved relationships, improvement in mental and physical health and wellbeing, reducing dependence on substances and a reduction in crime and re-offending. Reflecting on the importance of the Master Gardener community at Rye Hill illustrates the longer-term approach to recovery and the importance placed on peer interactions in motivating and supporting individual's recovery.¹⁵

The data also draws attention to the relationship between delivering an intervention in a prison context and participants' experiences; this highlights a number of factors to be taken into consideration at an operational and delivery level. Consequently, of importance is the need to recognise that there are challenges encountered in transferring the MG programme from a community to a prison setting, as such, there is a need for a shared vision and / or goal. This necessitates time and resources to build effective working relationships between all partners which rests on good channels of communication, shared values, an understanding of each organisational culture, constraints and priorities, opportunities for shared learning and a willingness to respond to practicalities associated with delivering an intervention in a prison. Building on international and national research exploring the use of horticulture in secure settings our research offers further evidence to demonstrate how such factors are prerequisites in creating an environment that is conducive to substance misuse recovery and an effective recovery journey.

14. Kirby, A., McSweeney, Turnbull, T., and Bhardwa, B., *Engaging substance misusing offenders: A rapid review of the substance misuse treatment literature* (2011), London: Institute for Criminal Policy Research.

15. HM Government (2010) *Drug Strategy 2010 Reducing Demand, Restricting Support, Building Recovery: Supporting People to Live a Drug Free Life*. London: Home Office.