

NGS Elsie Wagg Innovation Scholarship

Final Report Summary 2025



In 2021, the QICN and the National Garden Scheme created a scholarship programme for community nurses, the NGS Elsie Wagg (Innovation) Scholarship.

The scholarship was launched by George Plumptre, Chief Executive of the National Garden Scheme, speaking at the Queen's Nurse Annual Meeting on 12th May 2021, Nurses' Day.

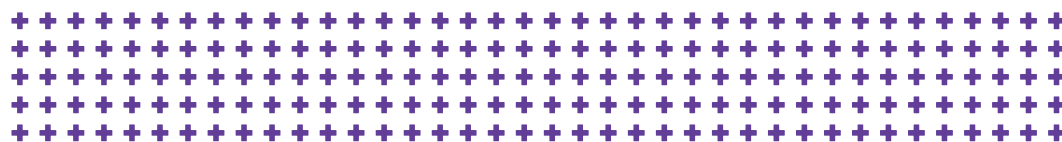
The Scholarship is open to all nurses working in the community and are awarded to five nurses submitting the best applications each year, for projects that promote the health benefits of gardening and garden visiting among a group of people.

The QICN has a long track record of supporting nurses to develop and implement their own ideas to improve the nursing care of the people they care for in the community. Project leaders receive a year-long programme of individual and group support, as well as funding to implement their project to improve healthcare.

The scholarship is named after Elsie Wagg MBE, the QICN council member who originally had the idea to open gardens to raise funds for the charity, which led to the creation of the National Garden Scheme in 1927.

The successful projects were based across England, from Essex to Lancashire.

The following is a summary of their final reports.



Background

The Queen's Institute of Community Nursing and the National Garden Scheme have worked closely in partnership as the gardens and health movement has developed over the past decade.

Gardens like the ones showcased in these nurse-led projects have clear and measurable benefits in physical, mental and emotional health. The specific benefits of individual projects vary quite widely, while also sharing common themes.

Some people have been helped to develop greater confidence in spending time outdoors, perhaps with their children or other family members. Personal bonds are encouraged to develop in a safe, relaxed and non-threatening environment.

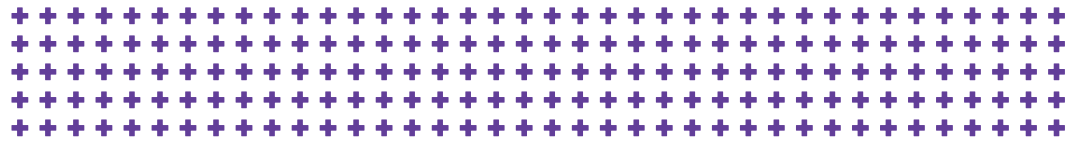
Physical activity associated with gardening can have a huge impact on people's mobility, balance and overall physical condition. The mental benefits simply of being outside can be described more easily than they can be measured, but a growing connection to nature through all our senses can have a transformative effect on almost anyone.

Other projects have connected people with trees and plants that produce fruit and vegetables. In an age when many people derive nearly all their food from shops, many of us have lost connection with the origins of food production. Food grown in gardens is more sustainable, having lower 'food miles', is often largely organic, and is natural and unprocessed. The projects themselves offer a wide range of benefits that strongly align with the global and Greener NHS sustainability agenda.

People of all ages can benefit from gardening and some of the most effective projects have been with care homes and nursing homes, making better use of the gardens that many homes have, re-igniting a lifelong hobby for many residents.

The gardens and health movement has great potential to support national and local efforts to improve good health and prevent ill health, to support healthier lifestyles and promote self-care, and to reduce health inequalities – all national policy imperatives for the National Health Service and part of the wider effort across the whole health and care system.

The science behind the health benefits of gardens and gardening is still very much in development. It can be much harder to measure the benefits of such 'soft' health and lifestyle changes, compared to the 'hard' data gained from pharmacological interventions. Both approaches are necessary if we are to achieve better individual and population health – we cannot medicate our way out of a public health crisis.



Garden to Plate project



Project Lead
Kendra Schneller

Aim of the Project

To improve the mental health and wellbeing of individuals living in or accessing homelessness services through therapeutic gardening and communal food-related activities.

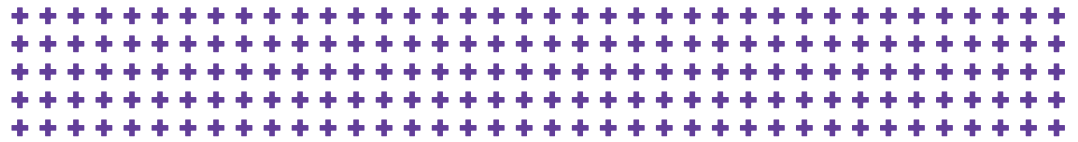
Project Summary

Garden to Plate was a nurse-led initiative based within homelessness accommodation. It created an inclusive, safe space where patients could grow, cook, and share food. Designed to support individuals facing mental health challenges, the project also encouraged informal engagement with wider health services through relationship-building and trust.

Despite operational challenges such as staff shortages and delays in funding, the project successfully established a therapeutic environment that supported recovery, learning, and connection.

Key Outcomes

- + Improved mental wellbeing through outdoor activity and routine
- + Increased awareness of healthy eating and physical health
- + Higher engagement with healthcare services
- + Strong participant ownership of the garden space



Unexpected Outcomes

- + Staff wellbeing improved through active participation
- + Uptake of physical health assessments increased
- + Participants developed practical horticultural skills
- + A participant-led community agreement was established

Health and Well-being Impact

Gardening and cooking promoted resilience, confidence, and emotional stability. Participant feedback noted reduced anxiety and increased motivation. Trust built with the lead nurse led to greater healthcare engagement.

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) scores showed marked improvements across all indicators for 8 of 11 participants, with one individual's score rising from 32 to 51.

Challenges Encountered

- + NHS systems made sourcing materials difficult
- + Clinic priorities sometimes interrupted sessions
- + Two initial sites failed due to lack of buy-in or ownership issues
- + Weather affected participation
- + Not all participants completed evaluation tools

Personal and Professional Benefits

The project reignited the project lead's passion for gardening and deepened their appreciation for its therapeutic value. Professionally, it enhanced skills in leadership, project delivery, and resource management.

Outstanding Achievements

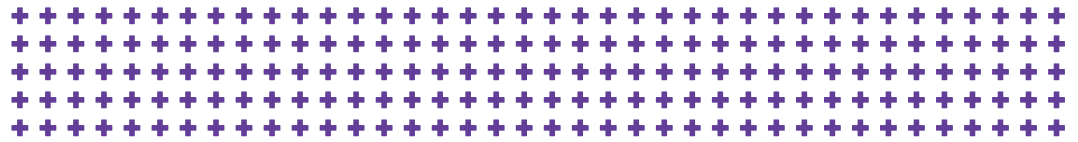
The project's greatest success was the depth of participant engagement, especially among those previously disengaged from healthcare. Ownership of the garden space helped individuals feel valued and motivated.

Sustainability and Legacy

The project now runs at a smaller scale, led by a site manager. A business case is in development for further funding to support expansion and embed a dedicated support worker.

Measuring Project Impact

Project team size: 1
Healthcare professionals involved: 2
Direct beneficiaries: 11
Carers/volunteers: 8



Advice for Future Project Leads

- + Clearly identify unmet needs early
- + Involve stakeholders from the outset
- + Use PDSA cycles to adapt as you go
- + Seek support—organisations like QICN can help
- + Plan for sustainability from the beginning

Case Study – Bob

Bob is a 58-year-old man who has experienced homelessness in the UK for over 20 years. Initially referred to a nurse-led clinic due to concerns about his physical health, he was reluctant to engage, often avoiding contact with the nurse altogether. He lives with hypertension, alcohol dependence, depression, and regularly uses cannabis.

As part of the Garden to Plate project, patients were invited to weekly therapeutic gardening sessions. Patient Y, who had previously worked in landscaping and had a trusted relationship with his keyworker, began to attend. Gradually, his engagement grew. He started talking to the nurse about his health and eventually requested a blood pressure check. Over time, he agreed to complete the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental

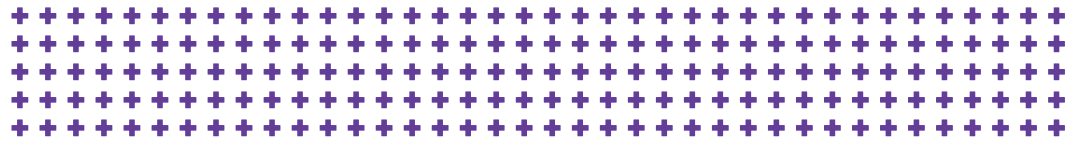
Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) and began taking prescribed medication for his hypertension.

Through his involvement, Patient Y was referred to both addiction and psychological support services, began attending GP appointments, and was supported in accessing housing services. He reported improved mood, reduced anxiety, and a renewed sense of purpose.

After nine months of intermittent engagement, his WEMWBS score had improved, reflecting his growing wellbeing and confidence.

As he put it: “Me don’t need drink or drug... me love gardening, it nice to get out dere and do sometin me enjoy. Me love de meals we mek with wha we grow.”

“Me don’t need drink or drug... me love gardening, it nice to get out dere and do sometin me enjoy. Me love de meals we mek with wha we grow.”



GPN Community Growers project



Project Lead

Taiyla Howard-Shore

Aim of the Project

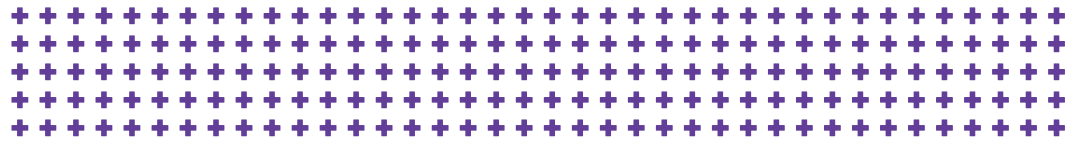
To support the mental health and wellbeing of early-career General Practice Nurses (GPNs) in Staffordshire through nature-based and creative activities embedded in professional development.

Project Summary

GPN Community Growers was developed as a wellbeing initiative for GPNs transitioning into practice. Responding to workforce pressures and pandemic-related stress, the project offered therapeutic activities that encouraged creativity, connection, and self-care. Three strands—Sew and Grow, Make and Paint, Bake and Share—formed the thematic basis for sessions, which were delivered during protected working hours to maximise accessibility. The project evolved over time to reflect participants' preferences and needs, eventually engaging over 30 nurses and inspiring further initiatives.

Key Outcomes

- + Improved wellbeing and morale among GPNs
- + Stronger sense of connection between trainees
- + Wellbeing embedded in GPN training pathways
- + Inspired adoption of similar initiatives across other practices



Unexpected Outcomes

- + A Facebook peer support group reached 76 members
- + Other GP practices began developing similar wellbeing activities
- + The social media hashtag #GPNCommunityGrowers gained traction
- + An allotment space was initially used and later relinquished, with peer support continuing virtually

Health and Well-being Impact

Using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), participants reported improved mood, reduced stress, and greater connection. Informal feedback highlighted the value of creative sessions and time in nature for both personal and professional resilience.

A Christmas wreath-making session was particularly impactful, fostering cross-cohort connection and celebration.

Challenges Encountered

- + Seasonal constraints affected gardening activities
- + Staff changes and time pressures required adaptive scheduling
- + Project leadership transitioned mid-way but was well supported

All challenges were met with collaborative planning, strong communication, and flexibility.

Personal and Professional Benefits

Leading the project provided valuable experience in planning, leadership, and resilience. It fostered confidence and a deeper understanding of supporting wellbeing in healthcare.

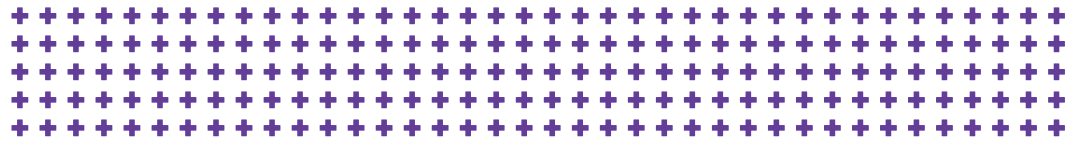
Outstanding Achievements

The integration of wellbeing into the core of professional development—not as an optional extra—was the project's greatest success. It has modelled a sustainable approach to embedding staff wellbeing within the NHS.

Sustainability and Legacy

Although the formal project has concluded, legacy elements continue:

- + Remaining funds will support future GPN cohorts
- + A Facebook group remains active
- + Wellbeing activities will continue within the GPN training programme
- + The model has potential for national scalability



Measuring Project Impact

Project team size: Approx. 13

Healthcare professionals involved: 30+

Direct beneficiaries: 25 GPN trainees and facilitators

Indirect beneficiaries: Not formally recorded but acknowledged in feedback

Advice for Future Project Leads

- + Secure protected time for your project
- + Build a reliable support network
- + Use social media strategically
- + Be flexible and responsive to change

Case Study

A newly qualified nurse, Lorelei, on the Staffordshire GPN School trainee programme faced significant personal and professional challenges, including an active family life, ongoing ill-health, financial strain, and the demands of university study alongside full-time work in primary care. The uncertainty of a permanent role at the end of the 12-month training programme added further pressure.

Prior to joining the wellbeing project, Lorelei was managing mixed anxiety and depressive disorder with medication and had recently been diagnosed with a blood clotting disorder, heightening their anxiety. The project was designed to support mental health, reduce stress, and prevent burnout. For this participant, the structured wellbeing days provided crucial time away from workplace pressures—a chance to ‘detox’, reflect, and connect with peers facing similar demands.

Despite feeling overwhelmed at times, particularly due to additional workload from university and the high expectations around

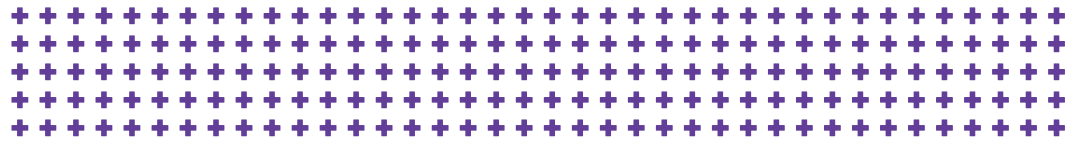
QOF and QIF targets, the project offered a lifeline. Dedicated time for socialising and open discussion helped to alleviate stress, while participation in gardening activities supported mindfulness, physical activity, and a renewed sense of purpose.

As the project progressed, Lorelei reported improved motivation, greater job satisfaction, and increased engagement in quality improvement initiatives. She took up further training to strengthen their role in primary care and began to apply the project’s wellbeing principles in the workplace, encouraging others to do the same.

The therapeutic benefits of gardening—such as fostering resilience, promoting relaxation, and enhancing presence—contributed to a reduction in burnout and absenteeism, improved team morale, and ultimately supported better patient care.

The project also had a positive ripple effect on Lorelei’s home life, helping to ease her overall workload and improve family wellbeing.

“The project also had a positive ripple effect on Lorelei’s home life, helping to ease her overall workload and improve family wellbeing.”



Growing Together project



Project Leads

Varda Lassman and Roy Tecson

Aim of the Project

To create a dedicated outdoor space that supports the wellbeing of care home staff and residents and fosters intergenerational engagement through educational activities with young volunteers.

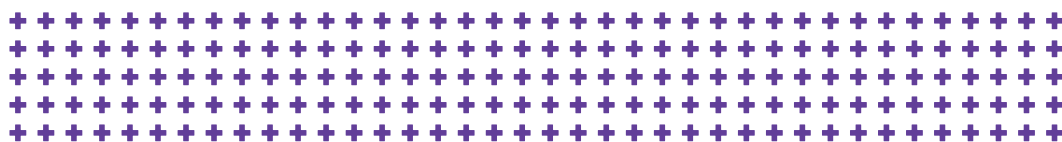
5. Project Summary

Growing Together aimed to transform a care home's outdoor space into a therapeutic garden benefiting staff, residents, and future volunteers. Key features included a staff-only garden area, engagement with local school students, and the development of quick-reference health resources for volunteers. The project also explored partnerships with local GP services to promote health and wellbeing.

The garden became a hub for reflection, education, and community building. Initial activity focused on staff wellbeing, with future plans to involve youth volunteers in structured intergenerational activities.

6. Key Outcomes

- + A private garden space was created for staff use
- + New partnerships were formed with local schools and community groups



- + Educational materials were developed for future volunteers
- + A gardening club was launched within the Trust
- + Collaboration with a local GP practice laid the foundation for joint events

Unexpected Outcomes

- + Stronger partnerships developed with the Horticultural Occupational Therapist and activity coordinators
- + Staff reported feeling more valued and heard
- + Homerton Hope Charity expressed interest in providing future funding
- + GoodGym's involvement helped deliver structural elements and promote the project online

Health and Well-being Impact

The garden had measurable and anecdotal impacts on staff wellbeing:

- + 77.8% of surveyed staff were more likely to use the space
- + 66.7% supported a staff-only sign to set boundaries
- + 100% of staff were aware of ongoing improvements
- + The average rating for feeling "heard" in the project was 4.875 (out of 5)

Open feedback noted the importance of having a peaceful place for rest and reflection. Resident wellbeing evaluation is ongoing, with initial signs of improved outdoor engagement.

Challenges Encountered

- + The scale of physical labour was underestimated
- + Project coordination was time-consuming alongside nursing duties
- + Construction skills were limited, requiring external help
- + Sourcing and scheduling volunteers and suppliers proved complex

Despite these hurdles, community partnerships enabled the team to complete key milestones.

Personal and Professional Benefits

The project supported the leads' professional visibility and deepened relationships with frontline staff. Personally, it provided space for reflection and connection and reinforced the value of green space in high-pressure healthcare environments.

Outstanding Achievements

The project's greatest success was creating a space where staff felt acknowledged and valued. In a busy, often overlooked setting, it offered visibility, voice, and wellbeing for those providing care.



Sustainability and Legacy

The garden has been formally recognised by the Trust and incorporated into wider discussions on green space development. Planned next steps include:

- + Expanding the staff gardening club
- + Increasing youth volunteering via Duke of Edinburgh links
- + Further therapeutic horticulture activities
- + Potential external funding from Homerton Hope and partners

Advice for Future Project Leads

- + Start early—time passes quickly
- + Listen first—tailor the project to real needs
- + Stay hopeful—even small steps create long-term change

Measuring Project Impact

Project team size: 2

Healthcare professionals involved: 5

Direct beneficiaries: ~50 staff and residents

Volunteers (Year 1): None formally, Year 2 to include school participants

Case Study

With support from the Queen's Institute for Community Nursing (via the National Garden Scheme), Homerton Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust launched the Growing Together garden. What began as a landscaping project quickly evolved in response to powerful staff feedback calling for a quiet, restorative space during busy shifts.

Staff described the emotional strain of their roles and the need for a peaceful area to decompress. In response, a dedicated "tranquillity zone" was created, featuring shaded seating, greenery, and fragrant plants to promote calm and reflection. Since its creation, staff have reported feeling genuinely heard and supported.

Garden breaks now offer a moment to reset, improving wellbeing and focus.

Comments included:

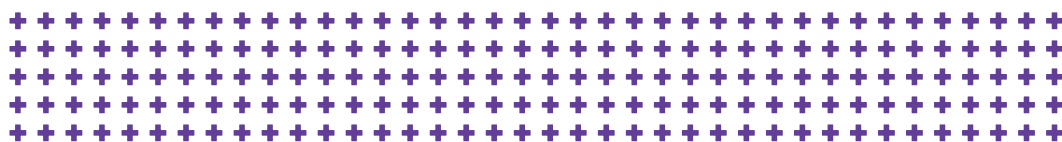
"Pleasant surroundings to get away from it all"

"Time to relax during break time"

"We were heard at last and are so excited"

The garden has empowered staff to shape their environment and opened conversations about extending the space for patient benefit. This case illustrates the transformative effect of listening to staff and acting on their wellbeing needs.

"We were heard at last and are so excited."



Space to Grow project



Project Lead

Sophie Daniels

Name of Co-applicants

Kaloula Hadji, Dr Eleanor Barnard

Aim of the Project

To create a multifunctional outdoor space that supports the health and wellbeing of people experiencing homelessness, while promoting wider community inclusion.

Project Summary

This project transformed a neglected green space beside a church into a therapeutic community garden. Initially focused on people accessing homeless services, it evolved to include a broader local population, offering a welcoming space for all.

The garden was co-designed with residents and homeless service users. Early momentum came from volunteers linked to Sutton PCNs and a local homeless clinic. While initial engagement fluctuated due to housing transitions and care needs, the team successfully re-engaged new participants through health and wellbeing events.

Activities included a summer health fair and a winter “Carols and Curry” evening. The space became a valuable venue for relaxation, inclusion, and therapeutic engagement.



Key Outcomes

Hosted inclusive health and wellbeing events
 Strengthened local partnerships across PCNs and services
 Fostered community ownership and reduced isolation
 Offered a peaceful, therapeutic outdoor environment
 Encouraged social prescribing and health coaching referrals

Unexpected Outcomes

- + Sutton PCN staff reported reduced stress and improved wellbeing from time in the garden
- + The space was used for mindfulness and light exercise
- + Healthcare staff adopted it for informal consultations and patient support sessions

Health and Well-being Impact

Participants reported improved mood, reduced anxiety, and greater social connection. Gardening gave people experiencing homelessness a renewed sense of purpose. Staff and volunteers benefited physically and emotionally from time outdoors. The garden also facilitated meaningful connections between professionals and service users.

Challenges Encountered

- + Volunteer engagement declined due to personal transitions
- + Conflicting views among volunteers were resolved through dialogue
- + A neighbour's feedback prompted changes to seating and layout to discourage antisocial behaviour
- + Gaps in early consultation were addressed through later outreach

Personal and Professional Benefits

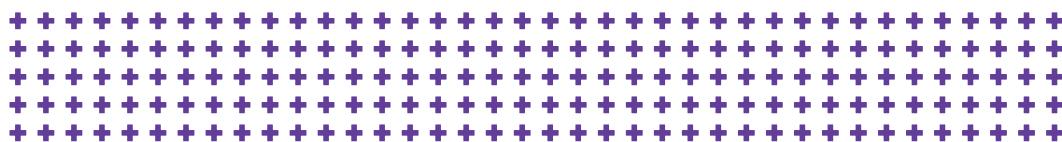
This was Sophie Daniels' first leadership role, providing significant learning in project management, communication, conflict resolution, and budgeting. Personally, it was fulfilling and built her confidence and adaptability.

Outstanding Achievements

The garden is now a valued community asset that bridges social divides and fosters connection, inclusion, and purpose.

Sustainability and Legacy

Although no future funding is secured, the garden is now largely self-sustaining, maintained by community members with minimal oversight. Its renaming to "A Space to Grow" reflects its ongoing evolution.



Advice for Future Project Leads

- + Allow more time than anticipated
- + Avoid relying solely on transient populations if measuring long-term outcomes
- + Stay flexible and responsive to change

Measuring Project Impact

Project team size: 5

Healthcare professionals involved: 3

Direct beneficiaries: 10

Carers involved: 3

Case Study – John

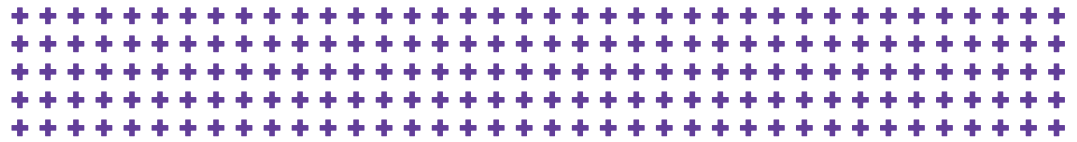
John, a man with a long history of homelessness and alcohol addiction, was referred to a community garden project by a local homeless charity. Before his involvement, he faced significant challenges with his mental health, motivation, and family relationships, particularly with his son. He often felt isolated and lacked a sense of purpose.

Initially hesitant, John began volunteering in the garden during the summer. As he became more engaged, he found the physical work and regular routine both rewarding and grounding. His involvement led to increased social interaction, improved mood, and greater motivation. The structure and community support offered by the garden played a key role in helping John maintain his sobriety.

Notably, John's personal relationships improved—especially with his son—and he began to rebuild trust and spend meaningful time with his family. His brother observed a clear improvement in John's well-being, attributing much of this positive change to the garden project.

John has since secured stable housing and expressed deep gratitude for the role the garden played in his recovery. He describes feeling a renewed sense of purpose after years of feeling worthless. His journey has also inspired others in similar circumstances, demonstrating how community-led initiatives can support recovery and social reintegration.

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The Healing Plot project



Project Leads

Alexandra Huddart and Sarah Scott

Aim of the Project

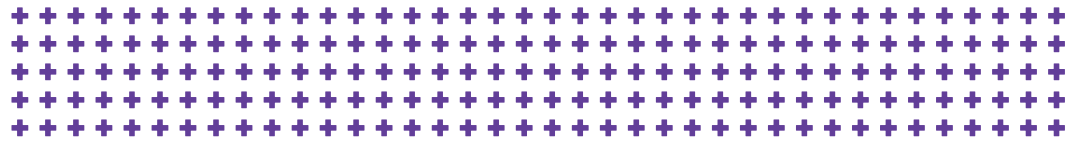
To create an accessible community garden – The Healing Plot – that supports people with lower limb conditions, improves access to green space, reduces social isolation, and promotes health, wellbeing, and self-care, while also reducing the environmental footprint of healthcare.

Project Summary

The Healing Plot was developed in partnership with the Wishing Well Community Centre, with support from the QICN Elsie Wagg Scholarship and the National Garden Scheme. The project transformed an under-used outdoor space into a therapeutic garden designed for people with lower limb wounds and other health challenges. The garden aimed to improve patient outcomes, reduce healthcare costs, encourage sustainable practices, and build stronger links between community, healthcare, and local organisations.

Key Outcomes

- + Education and empowerment of patients to support self-care.
- + Improved quality of life and mental wellbeing for participants.
- + Potential financial savings through fewer nursing visits, reduced prescribing costs, and prevention of wound recurrence.
- + Social benefits including intergenerational learning, collaboration between community and healthcare, and improved access to green space.



Unexpected Outcomes

- + The ramp required for accessibility was provided free of charge by a local railway company as part of their community initiative.
- + The project encountered vandalism and antisocial behaviour at the site, prompting investment in secure sheds and storage.
- + The garden space became a valued asset for local young adults with learning disabilities, leading to its wider use for enrichment activities.
- + Professional growth of the project lead, including enhanced leadership skills and achieving the Queen's Nurse title.

Health and Well-being Impact

Although planned follow-up QoL assessments could not be completed due to clinical pressures, initial baseline data highlighted high levels of reduced quality of life among participants. Informal feedback and observations indicated improved wellbeing, confidence, and healthier lifestyle behaviours through engagement with the garden and its activities.

Challenges Encountered

- + Time pressures due to clinical roles.
- + Illness of a key stakeholder.
- + Need for safe, bespoke accessibility solutions.
- + Long delays in the procurement and delivery of sheds.
- + Managing vandalism risks and ensuring safe storage.

Personal and Professional Benefits

- + Strengthened leadership, problem-solving, and resilience skills.
- + Greater confidence in partnership working across organisations.
- + Recognition of achievement through the award of Queen's Nurse title.
- + Enhanced community engagement, linking healthcare to broader wellbeing initiatives.

Outstanding Achievements

- + Creation of a safe, inclusive, and sustainable therapeutic garden.
- + Strong partnerships with community organisations, local businesses, and volunteers.
- + Expansion of garden use beyond original intentions, supporting young adults with learning disabilities.
- + Positive professional recognition for the project lead.

Sustainability and Legacy

- + Continued use of the garden by local young adults for growing produce, some of whom have gained new skills and qualifications (e.g., food hygiene certificate).



- + Plans for seasonal community events, such as a health-promotion BBQ.
- + Strong ongoing relationship with the Wishing Well Community Centre.
- + Plants, furniture, and supplies, will ensure that the project continues to grow.

Measuring Project Impact.

- + Initial use of the Keele University Quality of Life Wound Checklist (Green, 2021).
- + Intention to collect follow-up QoL data once service pressures ease.
- + Plans to gather qualitative feedback from service users and caregivers through interviews, with appropriate consent.

Advice for Future Project Leads

- + Build flexibility into your project plan – challenges and delays are inevitable.
- + Engage local businesses and community organisations early; their in-kind support can be invaluable.
- + Expect the unexpected – and embrace new opportunities that arise.
- + Consider storage, security, and accessibility from the outset.
- + Factor in the additional time needed to manage both project and clinical responsibilities.

Case Study

One service user with lower limb wounds engaged in the project reported difficulties with diet, footwear, and pain at the outset.

Through involvement in the garden, they gained access to fresh produce, peer

support, and meaningful activity.

They went on to achieve a Level 1 food hygiene certificate, and now volunteer in the Wishing Well Café attached to their GP practice.

“They went on to achieve a Level 1 food hygiene certificate, and now volunteer in the Wishing Well Café attached to their GP practice.”



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