



Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust (Broomfield Hospital)

Site of the Month (September 2014)

Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust provides a comprehensive range of acute and community based services. It also hosts regional plastics, head and neck and upper gastrointestinal (upper GI) surgical services and a supra-regional burns service to a population of 9.8 million. The Trust, based in the heart of Essex, employs over 3,800 staff and provides services from five sites in and around Chelmsford, Maldon and Braintree. The main site is Broomfield Hospital in Chelmsford, which has been redeveloped as part of a £148m Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Broomfield Hospital provides the majority of the Trust's services including A&E, emergency medicine and surgery, elective surgery in most specialties, and maternity and paediatric services.

Broomfield Hospital has two ancient woodlands situated on the hospital campus grounds; Pudding Wood and the Long Shapely Belt. These woodlands are steeped in over 270 years of history and the hospital is keen to ensure that this wonderful part of our heritage is protected for generations to come.

In 2009, the Trust entered into a Unilateral Agreement with Chelmsford Borough Council to deliver a Woodland Management and Improvement Project, which is aimed at maintaining the woodlands as an amenity for the quiet enjoyment of the public as well as to protect its natural habitats. A 10-year woodland management plan has been developed (including an Ecology Report & Survey) which sets out the Trust's commitments and ambitions for the woodland areas.

Since then the woodlands have been considerably improved. Improvements include a new footpath through Puddings Wood, an increased number of native trees and shrubs and the development of various seating areas to provide quiet rest spots. Regular volunteer days are hosted to ensure that the woodlands are maintained to a high standard. Our woodlands received Green Flag Status in 2012 and 2013.

Recently this project has been extended as the Natural Health Service Project. Due to the successful development work in the woodlands supported by various volunteer groups, further projects are now being delivered to improve the hospital's green estate even further and to also offer regular opportunities for children, young people and adults to achieve and develop confidence through hands-on learning in a woodland and/or garden environment.

The project is offered through a partnership led by professionals from Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, DF Clark (woodland and garden management services) and the Cause-an-Effect Foundation (a social enterprise focusing on social and educational change). In the summer of 2014, a community vegetable garden and a



fruit tree orchard were newly installed near its original building, Broomfield Court, to provide further opportunities for volunteering and community engagement.

Psychotherapy sessions were also introduced to evaluate the impact of these volunteer sessions on the participants and Jennifer Doré (Psychologist with Cause an Effect Foundation) says:

“The Natural Health Project at Broomfield Hospital is a free, easily accessible and natural activity that boosts our volunteers’ mental wellbeing. Whether it is our horticultural and conservation development programme or an exercise programme supervised by a therapist; being active outdoors is not only enjoyable but is empirically proven to provide significant improvement to mental wellbeing. At present we are in the early stages of monitoring the overall benefits to volunteers. However, to date we know that our volunteer population feel a natural and social connection with the estate and this wildlife, there is sensory excitement and an adrenalin rush regarding what they will discover on each visit and learning a new skill and completing a manual task (e.g. photography or conversation activity) leads to a rewarding sense of worth.”

It is important to the Trust that the woodlands and gardens on the estate provide a calm, relaxing and healing environment for hospital staff, visitors, patients and members of the local community. Various projects, campaigns and activities support this ambition and in 2014 we launched the Nurture 2014 Campaign (a campaign to recognise and celebrate the contributions of volunteers), a series of woodland and garden walks (offered to staff and visitors) and we are also working on developing a dementia garden (based on the principles of the reminiscence theory) and a labyrinth garden (based on therapeutic effect of walking on labyrinth).

This project is generously supported through various grant-funding organisations including the Heritage Lottery Fund, which aims to make a lasting difference for heritage, people and communities across the United Kingdom and help to build a resilient heritage economy, and also the English Woodland Grant Scheme offered by the Forestry Commission England.

For any further information on our project please contact Elmarie Swanepoel:

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If you wish to register with the NHS Forest or would like to write or be the subject of a site of the month case study, please contact [Mary Zacaroli](#).