

The Centre for Sustainable Healthcare –The NHS Forest Project at Guild Park

The Centre for Sustainable Healthcare (or CSH) is a charity focusing on the crossover between people’s health and environmental sustainability. The charity runs a number of programmes to benefit the public, many of which focus on activities with the NHS - including the innovative and award-winning NHS Forest project.

The NHS Forest Project enables patients and local people to access green spaces at NHS sites across the UK. To date, the project has planted over 35,000 trees at 150 sites and has won a Green Apple Award. Many of its individual community-based projects host events involving members from hard to reach groups, such as elderly people and school children, to share ideas such as eating local food and taking gentle exercise - all to prevent illness.

CSH runs the NHS Forest Project to directly benefit people’s health. A recent Health Protection Agency report specifically mentions the NHS Forest as a good example of creating urban green spaces to build people’s resilience to protect them from illness and a government White Paper specifically cites the NHS Forest as a valuable community-based health initiative.

NHS Forest at Lancashire Care’s Guild Park

At Lancashire Care’s Guild Park site, the NHS Forest has branched into a Grow Your Own food production project that makes polytunnels and outdoor growing spaces available to school children and community members in conjunction with service-users at the NHS mental health facility. There is a positive food production cycle: the school children plant vegetable seeds; the service-users water and maintain the young plants; the school children harvest the crop – learning about the cycle of nature and the health benefits of fresh, local food in the process. Surplus crops are made available to the hospital kitchen at 10% below the market rates for organic produce, and also shared with the local community.



This NHS Forest project offers the NHS Trust the means to engage with sectors of the local community and service-users in offering a horticulture programme where shared endeavours can combat the stigma of a mental health hospital. At this one site alone, the project enables 54 service users, 90 schoolchildren, 100 community members and 32 staff volunteers to work together every year, breaking down barriers between service users and community members, changing people’s attitudes to mental health issues and changing their behaviour to increase their wellbeing through horticultural exercise and healthier eating.

THE CENTRE for SUSTAINABLE HEALTHCARE

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Perhaps the words of the participants express the value of this project best of all:

"It's very therapeutic ... "

"Team work is a big part of it ... "

"I benefit from the exercise and fresh air ..."

"I feel I have gained confidence ..."

"The health benefits of being outdoors can't be beaten ..."

"I get a sense of achievement ..."

"It keeps me focused ..."

"We are self-producing and eat what we grow ..."

Future plans for the project involve supporting other green-fingered initiatives across the Trust, such as planting a sensory garden for elderly patients at a local care home and establishing a copse featuring NHS Forest trees in the grounds of a dementia-care hospital. At Guild Park, the planting is set to flourish, with the addition of a portacabin making the site accessible in all weathers and opening up opportunities for even greater involvement of the project participants. Elizabeth Harrison, Project Lead at Lancashire Care said: *"I'm so proud of everyone that has been involved and made the project possible ... The project provides an opportunity for social interaction and also promotes healthy eating and living. Participants are given the opportunity to build their self-confidence and transferrable skills such as teamwork and recognised qualifications. We are dedicated to providing a sustainable project with the purpose to grow our own fresh produce to be prepared and served in the Guild Lodge kitchen whilst benefiting the local wildlife and environment. The project has already been able to supply the Step Down Unit with local, seasonal and fresh vegetables along with suggested recipes. Research has showed that social interaction and activities such as gardening can have a positive effect on mental health and boost the moods of participants and by growing fresh fruit and vegetable the project also promotes healthy eating."*

For more details and photos please visit the NHS Forest web page: <http://nhsforest.org/lancashire-care-nhs-foundation-trust>

For more information on the NHS Forest or CSH's wider sustainability work please contact Sarah Dandy, NHS Forest Project Coordinator.

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