

## **Most Innovative Site**

Bethlem Royal Hospital. Raw Materials: Natural environment restoration for mental & physical well-being.

### **What have you done that is new and different?**

Over a five year timescale we have transformed the management and use of the natural environment at one of the world's most iconic psychiatric asylums, Bethlem Royal Hospital, (aka Bedlam) in London, to maximise the therapeutic benefits of nature for people with a wide range of severe mental health problems. Our project is unique in its melding of nature, nurture, therapy & creativity, restoration & recovery to maximise engagement & outcomes.

### **How did you do it?**

Through a mix of inspirationally minded and highly motivated staff members, service users and volunteers, as follows: Supportive managers and collaborators who sourced funding from a variety of sources including the Big Lottery and other Charitable funds. Partnership working with a range of organisations, most notably the Urban Orchard Project, Thrive (the therapeutic horticulture charity), the Trust for Endangered Species, and Arts organisations such as the Bethlem Gallery and the Museum of the Mind. Clinicians and Estates staff collaborated together to improve the environment in a multi-stranded approach which included:

- Improving the grounds maintenance of sensitive habitats, including rare meadows, extensive bluebell groves and old orchards.
- Establishing 3 way-marked nature trails through the woods, meadows and orchards of the site to encourage the therapeutic use of the natural environment.
- Clearing and restoring the lost orchards (the largest in London). Renovating old trees and replanting heritage varieties of fruit trees.
- Engaging service users in building an apple press in our woodwork workshop, pressing apples for juice and drying apples for sale.
- Building a new walled garden and greenhouses which produce a variety of fresh fruit & vegetables now used in patients cooking and healthy living groups.
- Vocational opportunities for service users now available in all of the above areas, including horticulture, harvesting, fruit drying and woodworking.
- Collaborating with service user artists and the Bethlem Gallery for an annual Art in the garden exhibition, and enhancing the grounds by art works made from the fallen trees and scavenged wood enhancing sustainability.

### **Who Benefitted?**

Primarily patients of the hospital, over 200 have been formally engaged in activities and vocational opportunities in the garden and orchards, plus many more people including staff, carers and visitors have benefited from the nature walks and buying fresh produce. The project has also played a pivotal role in encouraging the local community to visit the hospital grounds and helped to break down the stigma attached to the asylum.

### **What impact has it had?**

The impact on patient care and staff well-being has been profound, both in terms of patient motivation and engagement and in awareness raising about the benefits of nature and healthy eating. The project has grown exponentially as one success led to another and more partners have come on board. Guided tours of the natural wonders of the site have become increasingly popular and the project has been featured at National Conferences, in a book and in a BBC programme. Overall it has led to a greater appreciation of the natural wonders in the keeping of the NHS and a realisation that the hospital grounds are a unique natural oasis which can be harnessed successfully for the physical and mental health of all.

## Bethlem Royal Hospital - A Healing Environment



Nature Trails



Art in the Garden



Winter in the Walled Garden



Apple Harvesting



Environmental Sculptures



The Restored Orchards