

Sydenham Garden

Sydenham, London Borough of Lewisham



Growing Health Case Study

Health area: Mental health and dementia

This series of Growing Health case studies provide examples of projects which use food growing in the community to provide health benefit.

Key client groups

Sydenham Garden is a unique wellbeing centre utilising its gardens, nature reserve and activity rooms to help people in their recovery from mental and physical ill-health in Lewisham.

They aim to do this through providing co-workers (the name they give to their primary beneficiaries) an opportunity to take part in one of four main projects, along with many supplementary activities and clubs. Co-workers are referred to the project via their GP or key worker. They aim to promote inclusion and reduce prejudice by bringing together co-workers with different degrees of mental and physical ill health, volunteers and members of the local community to work together.

Summary of services

Sydenham Garden is an award-winning charity providing gardening, nature conservation and creative opportunities for the wellbeing of local residents. Patients are referred to one of their projects through their GP or key worker. Referred patients (known as co-workers) can work in the community garden and nature reserve and/or with the Art and Craft group. They also provide accredited training and help with progression to further education, volunteering opportunities or reemployment. Co-workers play an active part in the community garden and help shape the project as a whole.

Funding and Partners

The majority of the funding comes through grants, trusts and foundations, development organisations and Lewisham Council. In 2007, Sydenham Garden was awarded a five year grant from the Big Lottery Fund Reaching Communities programme. It was also part of the Mind Ecominds project. Since May 2013 Sydenham Garden has also been commissioned by Lewisham NHS.



Background

Sydenham Garden's mission is to promote the physical and mental wellbeing of south London residents, in particular by providing:

- a community garden where horticulture is used for therapy and rehabilitation
- opportunities for training for work and education
- opportunities for artistic and creative expression
- the protection and preservation of the environment for the benefit of the public through nature conservation or the promotion of biological diversity.

The garden was founded in 2002 by a small group of local residents including a local GP had the vision and dedication to convert a neglected nature reserve into a community garden. The laying out of the garden began in 2005 and it was officially opened in April 2006.

The organisation is run by a large team of over 75 team members, 8 of whom are paid employees. There is also an Art & Craft project worker which is an unpaid role. There are 9 trustees who responsible for the strategic direction of the charity. Volunteers are crucial to the Garden both in terms of running sessions and providing office support.

Links with local health priorities and services

Sydenham Garden is commissioned by Lewisham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to provide garden sessions for adults experiencing mental ill health and sessions for people with early dementia. It has an established health professional referral network in place, covering over 20 agencies. Sydenham Garden's services fit with local need and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment as the prevalence of mental illness is higher in Lewisham compared to the rest of England and for most of London. This poor mental health in turn has a great social and economic impact as well as leading to range of negative health outcomes. Lewisham have highlighted that prevention of conduct disorder through social and emotional learning programmes result in total returns of £83.73 for each pound invested (Knapp et al, 2011).

Service aims and delivery

There are a variety of therapeutic gardening sessions through the week for co-workers. Three of these projects are focused on Adult Mental Health and include gardening, art and craft, cooking and opportunities to achieve recognised qualifications. The fourth project is focused on Dementia and includes all the same elements but underpins them with Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST). Each co-worker sets their aims with the staff and volunteer team, and takes on tasks to help them to engage with the project and the land. A typical placement lasts between 12 and 18 months which enables co-workers to fully benefit from their

personal development programme. During 2011-12 Sydenham Garden received 173 referrals and held 79 introductions with potential co-workers. In 2012, 111 individuals attended at least one session, including 76 garden sessions.

In partnership with MindCare and Lewisham CCG, Sydenham Garden is offering programmes of therapeutic activities designed to support people in the early stages of dementia. Sow & Grow is a course that runs on weekly basis and lasts for six months involving gardening, cooking and craft activities, as well as opportunities for reminiscence, social interaction, reflection and discussion.



Aims of Sydenham Garden

- To contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of people experiencing social exclusion through mental ill health or significant illness living in Sydenham and surrounding neighbourhoods within the boroughs of Lewisham and Bromley.
- To contribute towards the building of community cohesion and inclusiveness.
- To build the skills and capacity within the local community and to support community participation
- To inform and engage local people in addressing their own and wider social, economic and environmental wellbeing.
- To reduce prejudice and to raise awareness, inform and influence others on the needs of those with mental ill health.

Objectives of Sydenham Garden

- To provide health, social, environmental, educational, and economic and leisure opportunities within a framework of a community garden and nature reserve.
- To provide opportunities for local people to come together through volunteering and creative activities, within the context of a community garden and nature reserve facility.
- To provide a locally managed community facility, that is accessible and open to all.
- To develop the community facility based on sustainable development principles.
- To provide community-based, community-inclusive services and activities.

Outcomes and key achievements

Every year they undertake an evaluation of their services; these evaluations have become more thorough and have implemented recognised measures over the past 2 years. They also had an independent evaluation carried out and published in 2011 which can be found on their website sydenhamgarden.org.uk/annual-evaluation/

In 2015 the evaluation highlighted Sydenham Garden's growth over the past 30 months, demonstrates that Sydenham Garden is reaching a diverse range of ethnicities and an even gender split and it shows strong evidence that Sydenham Garden is delivering significant health and social benefits for co-workers.

In order to assess improvement in physical health, mental health, social interaction, quality of life, confidence and independence levels of co-workers who completed their placement, Likert scale questionnaire (consisting of six items) was used. The questionnaires were completed by the co-workers when they started on the Garden project and then at quarterly intervals until they completed their placement. 39 co-workers completed the questionnaires more than once. A random sample group of 7 co-workers also completed WEMWBS (Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale) on 3 or more occasions to assess their wellbeing in comparison to the population and to monitor improvements during their placement. Co-workers were asked open-ended questions in order to reflect any changes in any of the six topic areas, along with setting their own goals and targets for their placement.

Quantitative study based on Likert Scale questionnaire

- 21 out of 39 co-workers (54%) recorded a positive change in their ability to undergo physical activity.
- 22 out of 39 co-workers (56%) recorded a positive change to their mental wellbeing.
- 22 out of 39 co-workers (56 %) recorded a positive change to their social inclusion and interaction.
- 24 out of 39 (62%) co-workers recorded a positive change to their quality of life.
- The following 2 questions we only answered more than once by 15 co-workers who completed their placement during the period. This was due to the questionnaire having the

questions added after the other 24 co-workers had already begun their placement.

- 7 out of 15 co-workers (47%) recorded a positive change to their level of independence.
- 12 out of 15 co-workers (80%) recorded a positive change to their confidence.

Quantitative study based on WEMWBS questionnaire

- Group initial average: 38
- Group completed average: 46

The overall group score improved by 21% during the garden sessions. The group average initially scored 38 and improved to scoring 46 by the time they finished. While the group didn't achieve an improvement to bring them up to the national average of 50.7, their score significantly improved by 8 points while they were on their garden placement.

Qualitative study

Interview responses were almost entirely positive about participation in Garden sessions.

- **Ability to undertake physical activity:** Some co-workers reported that taking part in Garden sessions enabled them to do more physical activity and that they enjoy the physical side. There was mention that it leads to greater satisfaction with other activities like eating and drinking.
- **Mental wellbeing:** Co-workers and carers found Garden sessions very helpful in improving their mental health giving them "purpose" "strength" "passion" and "hope". It is clear that co-workers perceive Garden sessions to be beneficial for their mental wellbeing.
- **Social inclusion and interaction:** All interviewees mentioned that both their social inclusion and their confidence to interact improved.
- **Confidence:** Co-workers feel that taking part in Garden sessions helps to increase their confidence "to be themselves", to use their skills, to interact with others and to take part in other activities.
- **Independence:** Some co-workers mentioned that Garden sessions have helped them to work independently of others.
- **Life developments:** Co-workers mentioned various and broad developments in life outside Sydenham Garden, many of which they directly cited the Garden session as the influencing factor. These included: Gardening and starting a business.

Key challenges

Funding: Covering the cost of the programme is a continual challenge for the garden. For example 40% of the funding comes to an end March 2014, which will be a large gap to cover.

Health and Social Care budget cuts: as referrals come from these sectors there may be a challenge in keeping the level of referral at the current level.

Key opportunities

Links with other organisations: Currently they collaborate closely with Bromley Mind, which means they can provide a better service with more expertise as well as a financial input.

Commissioning: they have recently received a three year contract, which will be used to prove the benefits of the service to the NHS.

Personalised Budgets: with the introduction of personal budgets in social care there is an opportunity for people to use their own budgets to access services at Sydenham Garden.

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Growing Health is a national project run by Garden Organic and Sustain, which is funded by the Tudor Trust, to see how community food growing can be routinely used by the health and social care services as a way of promoting health and wellbeing for a range of individuals and population groups.

To sign up to the Growing Health network visit

www.growinghealth.info

Supporting documents

The full report can be downloaded from sydenhamgarden.org.uk/annual-evaluation

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