Growing Support
Bristol

Growing Health Case Study

Health area: 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**

Growing Support works with older people and people with dementia, mostly living in residential care.

A Growing Support gardener is usually over 80, living with multiple long-term conditions, limited mobility and complex care needs which create challenges to carrying out day-to-day activities independently. This often includes Dementia, Parkinson’s disease, heart disease, the after effects of a stroke, poor eyesight or poor hearing. Many are wheelchair users and would struggle to go into the garden unaided.

**Summary of services**

Growing Support’s services are designed to enable older people and people with dementia to enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits of being outside, gardening and growing their own food. Everyday gardening activities are adapted to ensure they are accessible to everyone. A particular focus of the activities is stimulating social contact, a sense of belonging and of achievement.

We run weekly ‘gardening clubs’ delivered in care home gardens supported by trained community volunteers. Growing Support train care home staff to embed working outside in the garden into residents’ every day routine and provide advice, guidance and action planning to enable care home managers to make the most of their outdoor space.

We also work with community gardens to enable people with dementia to take part in community growing projects.

**Funding and partners**

Growing Support was launched with a grant from UnLtd under the Social Care programme which supports new enterprises with innovative solutions to tough social care problems.

Most of our funding now comes from Care Providers, Local Commissioners, the People’s Health Trust and local ageing and dementia care partnerships

**Background**

Growing Support was founded in 2013. The idea came from the founders’ personal experience of older relatives living in care sharing how lonely and frustrated they felt spending long hours in front of the television and not being able to go outside and do something fun and useful with friends.

Further research showed that this is a widespread problem and so a Community Interest Company was set up to tackle the issue. The first gardening group was launched in May 2013 at Milestones Trust’s Humphry Repton House, a specialist nursing home providing care for 45 people with moderate to severe dementia.

It was soon clear that gardeners often require individual support to take part and a community volunteer team was trained to help. Volunteers take on an enabling role, their job is to work alongside the gardeners providing assistance if required but not taking over the task. They also provide a valued connection with the local community and an opportunity for residents to socialise and reminisce with someone new.

As our reputation grew we received requests to enable people with dementia living in the community to take part in sociable gardening clubs. Our services now include building the capacity of community gardens and allotments to enable people with dementia to join their growing groups.
Links with local health priorities and services

Loneliness and social isolation, inactivity, ageing and dementia are all high health priorities locally and nationally.

Supporting people to be independent, providing meaningful activity and enabling residents to take part in physical exercise are all recognised as key components of good quality care by the Care Quality Commission. NICE quality standards of care include the provision of leisure activities that meet residents’ interests.

Growing Support was commissioned by South Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group to carry out capacity building and deliver regular therapeutic gardening clubs in four care homes as part of their dementia strategy.

We are also funded by Bristol Public Health to develop the capacity of community gardens in three wards to enable local people with dementia to participate in community gardening. We are also funded by the People’s Health Trust to develop an intergenerational gardening group in an under used communal garden in East Redcliffe.

Outcomes and key achievements

Growing Support worked with 25 care homes in 2015. We work with 40 community volunteers delivered more than 1,000 high quality volunteering hours last year.

Outcomes include:
- Increase in the amount of time spent outdoors interacting with nature
- Increase in amount of time spent personalised, meaningful activity
- Increase in social interaction
- Improved sense of belonging, sense of achievement and self-esteem
- Improved mood and behaviour, being calmer, less restless and less distressed

Aims

Growing Support aims to improve the quality of life for older people and people with dementia by tackling social isolation, loneliness and lack of meaningful activity.
Objectives

● Develop the skills, capacity and resources of care providers which support service users to access the benefits of gardening and being outside in nature.
● Empower older people and people with dementia to spend more time outdoors and take part in gardening activities which improve their health and wellbeing.
● Support older people and people with dementia to be more socially included by facilitating their engagement and contribution to growing initiatives at home and in their local community.
● Increase the involvement of the community and families in care by recruiting, training and supporting community volunteers and working alongside families.

Key challenges

Volunteers: All of the gardening clubs take place during ‘office hours’. Many of the volunteers use the experience to help them find work and so it is a challenge to maintain a stable volunteer team as they find jobs and move on.

Funding: There is a perception that people living in residential care are already being funded enough and so it can be a challenge to convince funders that current budgets do not have room for purposeful activity.

Key opportunities

Food growing: Growing food is an important part of gardening and could be used as part of a programme to improve food standards in care. We hope to further develop this aspect of our work in partnership with specialist partners.

Contact details

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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