Growing Well
Kendal, Cumbria

Growing Health Case Study

Health area: Mental health

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 Well provides local people with mental health problems an opportunity to get involved in a supportive and inclusive farm-based community. They help people to improve their mental wellbeing by providing training and volunteering opportunities based on its farm enterprise on the outskirts of Kendal, where it grows organic vegetables.

Summary of services

Growing Well helps people recovering from mental health issues to reduce their social isolation, develop their confidence and to reach their goals, through encouraging them to be involved in the running of a community-owned organic growing and training enterprise.

Their core enterprise activities are:
- to grow and sell organic produce to their local community; to provide accredited and informal training in horticulture and other land-based activities to a wide range of community members and groups;
- to provide educational visits to the farm and school based workshops for school children;
- to inspire others to grow their own food.

Funding and partners

Growing Well previously was funded by the Big Lottery. They also undertake consultancy to help other organisations to support their communities through food growing, for example they are currently working with the prison service.

Growing Well is also running a project to provide 50 six-month placements for people with mental health problems. This pilot project will work closely with local GP practices to test and evaluate a model of social prescribing, with the goal that this will be funded by GP practices in the future.

Links with local health priorities and services

Social care placements at Growing Well are set up by Community Mental Health Teams, which are multi-disciplinary teams that include both social care staff such as social workers, and NHS staff, such as Community Psychiatric Nurses.

They also had a social care contract with the local authority to provide volunteer opportunities through personalised budgets. However, due to spending cuts in local authority contracts they have focused on establishing a contract through Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) that would enable any GP in the area to send a patient. This was not taken up to due to lack of funds so they successfully applied to Northern Rock Foundation, to identify a way into CCG commissioning. A local mental health GP suggested collaborating with another charity that worked with people with mental health problems in an indoor setting, and from this they established a pilot. They have subsequently obtained a second grant from Cumbria County Council.

Background

Growing Well was set up in 2004 and has a voluntary board of directors. The land and buildings are rented from a tenanted National Trust farm, which has a farm shop that Growing Well supplies. The company employs three full-time and three part-time staff whose skills include management, training, education, psychotherapy and counselling. Before setting up, market research revealed that there was a shortage of structured day services for people recovering from mental health problems, and that those that did exist suffered from insecure, grant-reliant funding – which also meant they had high staff turnover. Growing Well uses an application process rather than a referral process. This supports its ethos that the volunteers are becoming active community members, rather than being ‘patients.’

The volunteers participate throughout the enterprise, from seed sowing to financial management, tractor driving to team supervision. They are supported by a well trained staff team who receive their regular supervision from a psychotherapist.

Volunteers attend the farm for between one half day and three days per week and some stay two or three years (there is no finite period). Some of the placements are currently purchased under contracts with Cumbria County Council and previously with Lancashire County Council and Job Centre Plus.

Local schools are encouraged to make structured visits (half day/full day) linked to the national curriculum, and particular experience has been developed with primary schools. As part of its work with the wider community, Growing Well offers accredited training in horticulture to the whole community, not just its students.
Service aims and delivery

Mission - Growing Well promotes mental well-being and organic horticulture through being successful, inspirational, community-focused social enterprise.

Aims - Growing Well has 5 aims:
1. To enable well-being by providing work opportunities for people recovering from mental health problems in a thriving social enterprise.
2. To run an organic growing business that involves and engages our local community.
3. To provide training and education that focuses on organic horticulture and promotes mental well-being.
4. To engage and communicate with the wider community to support Growing Well and promote our mission.
5. To maintain and improve the organisational systems, culture and structure that enables our mission.

Outcomes & key achievements

Growing Well provides around 2000 sessions each year (there is capacity for 2500) to around 50 volunteers, two-thirds of whom are male. Central to the success of Growing Well's support for mental health recovery is the active supervision system that all participants are involved in. Each month team members have an opportunity to sit down one-to-one with Growing Well's Volunteer Co-ordinator to track their progress towards their goals.

Growing Well previously used the Recovery Star as a tool to track the development of participant's recovery and the Warwick and Edinburgh mental well-being scale but have now moved onto using a tool called PHQ9 GAD7 and the Client Services Receipt Inventory. All the volunteers report significant improvement in confidence and self-esteem.
Key challenges

- Accessing statutory funding.
- People focus: Running a ‘people business’ in a farming setting.
- The time and energy required to engage with the local community.
- Engaging GP practices to encourage client referral.

Key opportunities

- Growing Well continues to market themselves to trusts and grant funders and the team are developing good relationships with GP surgery staff.
- Growing Well are currently exploring commercial sponsorship opportunities.

Supporting documents

Available to download at
www.growinghealth.info

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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