

Hope Gardening

A place for therapy, relaxation and change

Hope gardening is a series of linked projects working as part of the Northampton Hope Charity. Originally founded in 1974 and originally working only with homeless people, Hope continues to offer significant services to that group, alongside a wider range of services addressing mental health, addiction and wider poverty and social exclusion.

In 2011 we set up a social enterprise to offer work and trading opportunities, enabling people to access training and work experience. Initially we focused on catering and then garden tool recycling, but in 2018 we added new services for poverty, and then Hope Gardening.

For several years we have offered homeless people the opportunity to work in our day centre garden, a green oasis where they can sit outside, and enjoy a RHS Britain in Bloom Gold medal winning garden.

However we wanted to widen the range of opportunities available and since late 2017 we have been developing a large growing site in Kingsthorpe Northampton, which incorporates opportunities for growing veg and fruit at scale to feed people in our day centre, catering, and our food poverty social supermarket. But it is also much more than that: it also provides a space to learn about veg growing, for families and students, a place to begin careers in horticulture, for those looking to develop new skills: and very much a place that offers therapy and support to people with a range of other needs.

Therapeutic gardening

There is a considerable body of evidence about the therapeutic value of gardening, especially for mental health issues. (for example “The benefits of gardening and food growing for health and wellbeing” (Sustain 2014)

https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/the_benefits_of_gardening_and_food_growing/).



Being outside in the fresh air, with supportive, friendly people around you, working in a creative way to grow food, is profoundly therapeutic to many people, especially once people realise they are not being forced to labour intensively for hours at a time, but rather that they can work at their own pace, with plenty of breaks doing only what they are comfortable doing. Research indicates that it is especially valuable for people with mental health issues

(see appendix 1); however it can also be valuable experience for people with Alzheimer's, learning disabilities, and drug and alcohol dependencies.

A place for learning

As well as the therapeutic benefits, horticulture can be a career for anyone looking to work in the open air, and which at the start requires almost no formal qualifications nor experience, but can provide a livelihood and potential for much greater things. Hope Gardening offers the first steps in a career of this type, preparing people for more formal qualifications in the future, by giving basic introductory experience. It is ideal for those at some distance from the labour market, where the therapeutic aspects can combine with real practical skill development to enable real change in people with a range of issues; offenders, those recovering from addictions; those with learning disabilities or mental health problems.

Hope Gardening offers a space close to the centre of Northampton, in a safe environment on a local bus route. Working with the direction of an experienced gardener, individuals or small groups can spend as long or as little as they wish getting the experience of being in the garden, perhaps alongside support staff or carers from the place they come from, or independently; to benefit them therapeutically, or in working towards work in horticulture.

As well as growing fruit and veg, the site offers other gardening experience; flowers, herbs, shrubs. There are ample and relaxing seating areas, and shade, with toilets on site.

This is a highly protected and safe environment, with personal attention from experienced staff. People coming here can do as little, or as much as they wish to do, and will be supported to get the best experience possible that helps meet their needs.

Due to the uneven nature of the site it is not suitable for those in wheelchairs.

If you would be interested in hearing more about how Hope Gardening can offer a placement or working opportunity for somebody, then contact us directly on 08455199371 to find out more.



Appendix 1

Literature Review

The benefits of gardening and food growing for health and wellbeing (Sustain 2014) https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/the_benefits_of_gardening_and_food_growing/ has comprehensively defined the evidence base. This, and other case studies created through this project form a major part of the evidence. However, see also http://www.mind.org.uk/media/211255/Ecotherapy_The_green_agenda_for_mental_health.pdf the review by Bragg (2013): <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/354166/Ecominds-effects-on-mental-wellbeing-evaluation-report.pdf> Buck (2016) and Clatworthy et al (2013) for a substantial and recent body of evidence that 'greencare' or 'ecotherapy' provide a substantial impact on mental health, substance misuse and recovery and on wellbeing for those without mental health problems.

The broader contribution of specific elements in recovery from mental health have been characterised by Leamy (2014) and gardening falls within these.

As Grabbe et al. (2013) have shown, gardening can also provide those affected by homelessness respite from mental illness, and is a low cost method of intervention. Further, as Jones (2000) notes, providing a 'safe space' can encourage development of social and personal skills, as well as transferable skills into employment. Additionally, she notes several examples in the USA where the sale of products and goods grown by the clients can fund a large percentage of the cost of operating such a scheme.

Dobson and McNeill (2011) add to the support of gardening as part of developing those affected by homelessness as it can provide an all important sense of mean to client's lives by providing them with meaningful work and activities. This comes with a caveat as noted by several other authors that these gains are only beneficial as part of a holistic package of care, shelter and intervention, but these can be met by the Hope Centre.

Bibliography

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