We provide advice and support to anyone experiencing a mental health problem. We campaign to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding.

First published 2013 by Mind
Mind’s registered charity number is: 219830
All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form
Design by Carbon Creative
Printed in the UK by Healeys Print Group
For many people being outside feels good. Whether you're exercising, gardening, just going for a walk, or doing some volunteering, being out in the natural world can have a positive effect on your physical health and wellbeing. There is good evidence that interacting with nature is instrumental in helping people manage their mental health and wellbeing. Mind calls this process ecotherapy.

As part of a 2007 campaign to promote ecotherapy, Mind published *Ecotherapy: the Green Agenda for Mental Health* – a report which sets out the case for using ecotherapy as a cost-effective and natural addition to existing mental health treatment options. The report helped Mind to ensure that Changing Spaces, the Big Lottery Fund flagship environmental funding programme, included Ecominds as a mental health component. Mind became a Big Lottery Fund award partner for Changing Spaces, alongside Groundwork, Natural England, research consultancy BRE, and the Royal Society for the Wildlife Trusts.

Mind was allocated £7.5 million for Ecominds to fund organisations in England to develop ecotherapy activities. Between 2009 and 2010, Mind funded 130 projects run by a range of environmental charities, farms and community gardens. What they all held in common was the knowledge that connecting people with nature can help to improve their wellbeing and mental health.

Grants of between £10,000 and £250,000 funded a diverse range of ecotherapy activities, which included:
- social and therapeutic horticulture
- care farming
- facilitated green exercise
- nature art and craft and
- environmental conservation.

This directory lists the 130 projects that received an Ecominds grant. It outlines some of the outstanding achievements they made over the last five years. It also points to the future, with details about future plans for providing ecotherapy. At the time of writing we know that 63 per cent of Ecominds projects had received some type of continuation funding, from a range of sources.

The directory also includes information about the network of local Minds across England that provide ecotherapy services. Entries are organised by region so you can quickly find out what is happening in your area.

Ecominds has contributed to the growing interest and awareness of ecotherapy and its benefits for mental health and wellbeing. Many projects established links with a range of partners, including those in local authorities and primary health care services. Access to ecotherapy is increasing, sometimes through referral by GPs and community mental health teams. Some areas are lucky enough to have community referral, or social prescribing, initiatives where people can get a prescription for ecotherapy from their GP.

Mind is committed to ensuring ecotherapy is made available everywhere. To this end, we have produced this directory as part of a set of publications which explore the outcomes and impact of the five-year funding scheme.

The following publications can be downloaded from our website:

*Feel better outside, feel better inside: Ecotherapy for mental wellbeing, resilience and recovery*
This report sets out how ecotherapy can be used by health, social care and public health professionals to improve health and wellbeing.

*Ecominds effects on mental wellbeing: An evaluation for Mind*
This report outlines the results of an independent evaluation, conducted by the University of Essex, of the wellbeing outcomes of Ecominds.

October 2013
Ecominds funding did not apply to Wales, however you can find a list of ecotherapy activities run by local Minds in Wales on page 138.
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map of regions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecominds projects</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern England</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England-wide</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and The Humber</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecotherapy at local Minds</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphabetical list of projects</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Under the Greenhouse
Hot like an erupting Orange Volcano
Bubble wrap on the windows
Like a secret hideaway
Full of flowers
Roots under soil
The sound of a Whirling Heater
Big Wood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental conservation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead organisation: Hill Holt Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norton Disney, Lincolnshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01636 892 836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:health@hillholtwood.com">health@hillholtwood.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hillholtwood.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/hillholtwood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hill Holt Wood is a social enterprise situated within a publicly accessible woodland. It works with the local community to create a better environment, provide employment and reach out to those in need. Hill Holt Wood operates in the community providing a range of services including education and training for young people aged between 14 and 19, adult education courses in the woodland, countryside and forestry management, and access to green space for people experiencing mental health problems.

The Big Wood project helps people experiencing mental and physical health problems to get involved in local environmental projects that improve their health and wellbeing. Participants are supported by experienced woodland rangers who promote social interaction and encourage participants to share their feelings and experiences. An occupational therapist helps participants to develop goals, identify personal strengths and progress towards recovery.

**Big Wood has given me motivation, structure, self-confidence, a creative outlet, friendship, a feeling of doing something direct and positive for the environment, and the knowledge that I can work again – previously I had lost all hope of that happening.**

(Jay, Big Wood participant)

**What next?**

Hill Holt Wood now offers ecotherapy at three other sites in Lincolnshire and has developed income streams to support the project in future.

15% of the Ecominds participants are now in full or part-time paid work
Stonebridge City Farm is a small slice of the countryside in the heart of the City of Nottingham. The farm’s Farm Calm project used Ecominds funding to provide drop-in days twice a week for 30 people recovering from mental health problems. People were able to self-refer or be referred via their GP, occupational therapists and other partner organisations including Framework and the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum.

Over 14 weeks, participants were offered a range of therapeutic activities including horticulture, environmental art and craft, animal care and wildlife conservation. The project culminated in a public photographic exhibition celebrating participants’ achievements.
Green Wellbeing (Idle Valley Ecominds)

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust
Retford, Nottinghamshire
01777 713 940
info@nottsut.co.uk
nottinghamshirewildlife.org

The Idle Valley Ecominds project is a therapeutic conservation and horticultural project for people who live in Bassetlaw and the surrounding area, who are experiencing mental health problems ranging from mild depression to severe and enduring conditions. Based at the Idle Valley Nature Reserve, a former gravel pit, transformed into a beautiful and inspirational setting in which to learn conservation and horticulture skills.

Participants can take part in a variety of activities such as maintaining the nature reserve through coppicing and clearing scrub; developing knowledge of organic and sustainable vegetable growing; or attending workshops and courses in woodwork, willow-weaving, and art and craft.

All participants are supported by staff and volunteers who have experience of mental health work. Referrals are taken from community mental health teams, GPs and local third-sector organisations. Self-referrals are also accepted.

The project adopts an inclusive approach. At every step staff engage volunteers in decision-making to create a culture of valuing people. A volunteer advisory group provides anonymous feedback to help the project adapt to user needs, and volunteers also attend steering group meetings, providing valuable input into the direction of the project.

Integration with the other volunteer groups working on the reserve is encouraged to help raise awareness of mental health issues. Some participants are now volunteering for the Idle Valley reserve officer, independently of the group, and many joint work parties have completed tasks together at the site.

The project was featured by BBC TV’s Countryfile programme in September 2012. Gaining recognition on a programme that is broadcast nationwide to an audience of about six million people was a real plus point for the group.

What next?
The project’s short-term goal is to continue to gather robust evidence to support an application to the local clinical commissioning group, who have expressed their support and desire that the project features in the remodelling of mental health services in Bassetlaw. They are particularly interested in what the project can offer for people with dementia and their carers, and Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust are keen to explore and develop this. The trust is also applying to the Big Lottery Fund’s Reaching Communities fund to help the project progress into its next phase.

Of the 32 participants who evaluated their experience of the project:

- 88% report an improvement in mental wellbeing as a result of attending the project
- 75% report improved confidence
- 55% report improved physical health
- 100% report a positive and supportive atmosphere.

Participants report that they feel a sense of belonging and that they enjoy feeling part of a team. They list these as key benefits of the project.

As I got more involved I got a lot more confident. I really like being able to help other people. Volunteers come and talk to me because they know I’ve been through the things they’re going through.

(Project participant and volunteer group leader)
Grow It

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Amber Trust
Belper, Derbyshire
01773 599 599
info@ambertrust.co.uk
ambertrust.co.uk
@AmberTrust

The Grow It allotment is a supportive learning environment that enables people to improve their mental and physical wellbeing and confidence through hands-on allotment activities and organised visits to other allotments and gardens.

Participants can get involved at all levels, from choosing the types of plants they grow right through to the harvesting of crops and sharing the produce from the allotment. They can choose to undertake City and Guilds training.

I leave the allotment with a sense of satisfaction and contentment. I am so relaxed afterwards. I have made friends that I can talk to, and that helps my worries go away – I don’t feel so isolated. (Grow It participant)

What next?
Amber Trust plans to build on the success of the Grow It allotment by offering services and activities to a wider group of people, including:

- people with dementia and Alzheimer’s
- people with learning disabilities
- people with sensory impairments
- families on a low income.

Working with these client groups and partner organisations the project plans to offer:

- weekly planned social sessions for different groups
- cooking and tasting activities for low income families in collaboration with a food co-op
- learning sessions for young parents and their children
- more accredited training options such as Open College Network courses
- arts and crafts activities
- seasonal community events for spring, Halloween, Bonfire Night, Christmas (wreath-making, holly-picking).

New ideas for the future include a sensory garden for groups with sensory impairments; a rolling programme of horticulture activities; food growing with primary schools and nurseries where children visit the allotment and learn about the growing cycle.

The overarching theme for all activities in the garden will be wellbeing in its broadest sense. Grow It will continue to promote healthy eating, good mental health and community cohesion.

The allotment provides a safe and friendly environment for participants to develop their self-help and independence skills. The community involvement they cultivate with other allotment-holders is an added benefit.
Network Nature Express

Nature art and craft

Lead organisation: Network for Change

Leicester, Leicestershire

networknatureexpress.blogspot.co.uk | networkforchange.org.uk

Based in Leicester, Network for Change is a voluntary sector organisation providing supported housing, community outreach and resource centre activities designed to meet the needs of adults whose mental health problems have impacted significantly on their quality of life. Their values and working practice focus on recovery and person-centred approaches to improve wellbeing and potential.

Network Nature Express provided people experiencing mental health problems with opportunities to access green spaces and to connect with nature and wildlife. Participants took part in a variety of activities, including a ‘hawk walk’, where they had the opportunity to handle falcons, hawks and owls and experience the birds ‘flying to glove’ – coming out of the sky to land on their gloved hands.

The group also attended a two-day residential visit to Shining Cliff Hostel in Derbyshire. Set in peaceful woodlands, the hostel provided them with a welcome break from city life. Participants learned how to light fires safely in woodland and made outdoor candle holders from natural materials – including using stinging nettles to make string.

At the end of the project, participants created artwork using a variety of media to show how they had benefited from their experiences in nature. Their work was featured in a public exhibition at Fabrika, Leicester’s Independent Art Centre.
In 2010 and 2011, the project:

- supported 1,085 people to access practical skills and training in cycle maintenance
- guided 39 people into further learning, volunteering and employment
- engaged 20 volunteers (12 of whom were previous participants)
- saved 888 bikes from going to landfill by refurbishing them and donating them or selling them on.

89% of participants reported that their mental wellbeing had improved as a result of attending The Bike Club.

The Bike Club is a social enterprise that refurbishes bikes and supports vulnerable people to develop beneficial practical and social skills.

Ecominds funded the full-time role for the project’s bike specialist and supported the post-holder to become a fully-trained bike mechanic with Cytech accreditation. Ecominds funded new promotional materials to raise awareness of the project and helped The Bike Club establish itself in Nottingham and gain credibility with other community initiatives. The project now has strong ongoing partnerships with Ridewise, Cycling for Health and the Local Sustainable Transport Partnership.

What next?

After the Ecominds funding ended, The Bike Club received a Big Lottery Fund Reaching Communities grant enabling it to continue until 2015. The project took on a trainee and set up several community hubs enabling the project to support more people experiencing mental health problems.

The long-term plan is for The Bike Club to become a fully sustainable social enterprise.

I have schizophrenia and have been unemployed for a long time. After I finished my bike I stayed on to help others with theirs. I really enjoyed the course and think it has really helped me.

(Simon, project participant)

I have struggled in group situations before and didn’t know how I would get on, but I have really enjoyed it. I enjoyed working with tools rather than bits of paper and was quite good at it. My bike gets plenty of use as I have now enrolled on another course.

(Jason, project participant)
The Genesis Allotment Project

The Genesis Allotment Project is run by Emmanuel House, a day centre for homeless and vulnerable people. It provides people with the opportunity to visit an allotment at St. Ann’s Allotments, Nottingham – the largest and oldest Grade II allotment site in England.

Participants are supported to use the allotment to grow vegetables for the day centre’s kitchen, and to develop the site as a place of beauty that sustains wildlife. Participants benefit from the opportunity to interact with other plot-holders and members of the local community.

Ecominds funding supported the project to open five days a week and develop into a sustainable resource for healthy food, physical exercise, social interaction and skills training. The project allows people, who are sometimes isolated from society, to reconnect and feel ownership of a space, working with the wider community to reduce the stigma associated with mental health problems.

Produce from the allotment is enjoyed by other Emmanuel House visitors with special barbecues and dinners being held to showcase participants’ work.

What next?
The project has been successful in securing over £28,000 from Comic Relief to fund an activities worker to lead the allotment project until 2015. It has ongoing ambitious plans to landscape the allotment site and increase its productivity.

It relaxes you. It concentrates the mind away from your problems.

(Genesis Allotment Project participant)
Trellis

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Ecoworks
Nottingham, Nottinghamshire
01159 622 200
info@ecoworks.org.uk
ecoworks.org.uk

Ecovorks supports people who are socially disadvantaged to take part in activities connected with conservation, restoration and enhancement of the environment. The organisation’s Trellis project occupies 1.3 acres of green space in Nottingham, offering a range of opportunities and activities including organic gardening and planting, orchard and green space maintenance, landscaping, green building (including the upkeep of a large straw bale building), green craft, arts, garden kitchen cooking and preserving.

Based within a leading permaculture garden in the largest heritage allotment site in the UK, Trellis offers people with mental health problems a nurturing environment to experience the benefits of ecotherapy. Open three days per week, Trellis provides a free minibus pick-up, free cultivated fruit and vegetables to take home, volunteering opportunities, outreach events and learning activities. Importantly, it also provides a space for respite, support, friendships, personal development and learning.

Trellis is led by its participants. Garden areas and allotments are managed by individuals and groups, and all participants have regular input into shaping and developing the site. Participants with a wide range of mental health needs are referred onto the project by community mental health services, GPs, or are self-referred.

What next?
The Trellis project will continue to support people experiencing mental health problems to get involved in ecotherapy activities. Ecoworks will continue to offer ecotherapy activities that improve access to green spaces, support community engagement and regenerate the local environment.

This has been fantastic for my son. It’s really turned his life around. If only you’d seen him a year ago, he was in a bad place, but now, honestly you want to see what he’s done in his own garden.
( Parent of Trellis participant)

As a community mental health team, we struggle to find anything quite like this project, which supports service users in a very relaxed and nurturing way.
(Stan Unwin City Recovery Team)
Clinks Care Farm

Care Farming
Lead organisation: Clinks Care Farm
Toft Monks, Norfolk
01502 679 134
clinkcarefarm.org.uk

Clinks Care Farm is a 143-acre mixed farm in Toft Monks, South Norfolk. It combines care of the land with care of people, offering disadvantaged individuals the opportunity to work on the farm. Here, people with mental health problems take part in meaningful work in a supportive, therapeutic environment that also helps them to learn new skills and prepare for employment. People who have spent time on the farm show improved confidence, self-esteem and motivation.

Ecominds funding has enabled Clinks Care Farm to promote mental and physical health and wellbeing, for example, by allowing it to employ a part-time project worker to help volunteer farmers make the most of their experience. Facilities have been improved for volunteers to have lunch together and interact, as well as to facilitate indoor training and activities such as jam-making and processing produce.

Farm helpers are one of our main ‘crops’. We plant seeds of hope, patience and self-belief in people’s minds and allow them to grow in confidence. When they are fully grown and ready, we look for pathways for them to move on. (Clinks Care Farm staff member)

What next?
Clinks Care Farm was awarded an NHS innovation grant to extend the project. The farm partnered with the local mental health recovery team and the Great Yarmouth and Waveney Primary Care Trust to launch a new project, Farming on Prescription, in November 2010. The Farming on Prescription project received national and international attention and its model may be rolled out in other parts of the UK. The model has influenced county policies in Norfolk and Suffolk. Both county councils source information and support from Clinks Care Farm to develop care farming and to encourage tenant farmers to enable community use and diversification of their farms.

The Farming on Prescription project will continue, extending its target groups to include people with learning disabilities and autism. Clinks Care Farm has secured a contract with the local NHS body and has received interest from others. The farm is accredited by both Norfolk and Suffolk county councils social services teams, and receives referrals from social workers for long-term placements funded through NHS personal budgets.

In May 2013, the farm launched a two-year Rural Opportunities project to support farm helpers to move into employment, work experience, volunteering and further education. This project will develop and strengthen a network of local and rural employers around Clinks Care Farm. The farm has also secured funding from Norfolk County Council and South Norfolk Council to continue to engage people from these areas.

Of the 60 participants in the project:
• 15 went into employment
• 2 started their own business
• 12 went into volunteering
• 2 went into further education

When I started middle school I became withdrawn, lost confidence and was bullied. I went to a psychiatrist, had counselling and took antidepressants but none of it worked. Then my GP asked me if I had thought about Clinks Care Farm. I was 17 at the time and it was a big step for me but it worked out well – I now work full time at a commercial pig farm in South Norfolk. (Farming on Prescription participant)
Eco Routes ran weekly conservation sessions to help and encourage people to access their local natural environment. Participants worked on a range of projects in nature reserves and open spaces to improve biodiversity and enhance visitors’ experience by improving paths, boardwalks and other facilities, and participants were committed and dedicated to the sessions, attending regardless of the weather. Many have continued their volunteering with other local conservation groups.

Eco Routes supported people experiencing mental health problems into volunteering and employment through a holistic programme of training and social activities. Participants attended training courses, gained new skills, and developed their social and time management skills. The project supported ran alongside two other projects that were focused on employment.

The project grew over its 14 months, with numbers of referrals increasing as time went on.

My son is more positive and far more confident about life in general now. The Eco Routes project made him realise that there are other jobs available that he is capable of doing.
(Mother of an Eco Routes participant)

I overcame fears of meeting people and making friends. I think that helped me become more confident.
(Eco Routes participant)

Almost 50% of participants moved on to education, employment or further volunteering by the end of the project.
Family Action provides services to disadvantaged and socially isolated families. With Ecominds funding, Family Action partnered with West Norfolk Mind and the Garden Science Trust to develop ESCAPE – a community-based allotment project at Tumbler Hill allotments in Swaffham. The project aimed to promote participants’ mental and physical wellbeing, to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health, and to help people gain confidence by learning new skills.

Supported by a team of staff and volunteers, participants took part in gardening and maintenance activities. They were offered the choice of either working on communal plots, or taking on their own area of the allotment. Monthly ‘Meet and Eat’ sessions encouraged the group to cook and enjoy the vegetables they had grown.

The project developed a variety of growing areas that appealed to different interests – including fruit and vegetable plots, a herb bed and wildlife areas. The design of the allotment catered for a wide range of needs and abilities and aimed to be as inclusive as possible.

The allotment was a safe and peaceful place with a friendly atmosphere. The whole group worked together to contribute ideas and to achieve the project’s goals.

I felt I was really achieving something.
(ESCAPE participant)

For participants, ESCAPE resulted in:
- significant psychological improvements
- improved social networks and physical health
- reduced caring responsibilities for families
- improved school attainment
- reduced mental health care costs
- an estimated £88,000 of benefits to participants, volunteers and secondary stakeholders generated between October 2011 and September 2012
- almost £10,000 of benefits to mental health providers, including the NHS, in the same period
Gardening for Health engages people with mental health problems in practical outdoor work, using a variety of tools, on a successful working allotment. With the support of therapeutic workers and a team of volunteers, participants are encouraged to adopt a piece of the allotment and take responsibility for it. Everyone is part of the team and gets involved in all aspects of planning and managing the allotment, helping to create a positive atmosphere for all.

The first night after going down to the allotment, my muscles ached. But it broke a cycle. Where usually I would have depressive thoughts going round and round in my head, now I was focusing on how I felt physically instead. I got a good night’s sleep for the first time in ages. After a few weeks I felt so much fitter and healthier. I also felt better about going out and seeing people. I went from thinking I was alone to realising that other people have the same kinds of problems. (Gardening for Health participant)

What next?
West Norfolk Mind is currently working with a number of organisations to develop the project and secure its long-term future. The project team is actively seeking alternative sources of funding from a range of funders and philanthropic bodies that may help the project developing beyond its current remit.

West Norfolk Mind is confident that Gardening for Health can become sustainable. To this end, the project team is exploring potential partnerships with WRinKL (Wood Recycling in King’s Lynn) and training provider Seetec.

Seetec currently uses the North Lynn allotment for its community gardening scheme, which engages local volunteers – many of whom are long-term unemployed. Gardening for Health has plans to offer gardening support to more local people, focusing on the elderly, socially isolated and vulnerable.
Many participants reported an improvement in their health and wellbeing as a result of engaging with the Golden Wood project.

Two people have moved on from the project to volunteer regularly with Green Light Trust, helping with outdoor conservation at Green Light Trust’s Foundry site.

Two other previous participants are now in part-time employment as a direct result of gaining self-confidence through the programme.

One participant, George, was very shy and withdrawn at the start of the programme but by the end of the course he was confident enough to show examples of his artwork.

Another participant, Carl, was very moved by his experiences on the project. He wrote a poem about the time he spent close to nature and how it made him feel to be outside and working in the woodlands.

Green Light Trust is an environmental charity that helps people, communities and organisations create sustainable living and protect our planet. The Trust’s Golden Wood project offers people with mental health problems access to informal woodland and wildlife skills training in a natural woodland setting.

Participants help to shape the environment by planting new trees and looking after the existing woodland. The work involved helps participants to reduce their feelings of isolation, improve their social skills, interact with their community, build their confidence and self-esteem, and increase their physical and mental wellbeing.

Ecominds funding has enabled Green Light Trust to run two 12-week programmes and to transport participants and their supporters to and from the woods. The project team is now working with the University of Essex on a formal evaluation of the project.

I feel that I’m doing something worthwhile that makes me feel really good about myself. Other people have noticed the difference in me since I’ve been coming here. It’s great – it’s just what I need.

It’s good for my mental health to be outside. It’s good to get out and see other people.

When you just stand here it’s nice to hear all the different sounds like the different birds... It gives me something to do and makes me feel useful.

(Golden Wood participants)

What next?

Green Light Trust has been able to secure other sources of funding to continue the programme. They will run another woodland ecotherapy course in autumn 2013, and some new courses in Frithy Wood.
Growing Clearer Minds received Ecominds funding to run three 12-week courses to encourage people with mental health problems to make use of local green spaces. Activities featured workshops, demonstrations, guest speaker talks, visits, research, and the opportunity to get involved in local environmental projects and organisations.

Participants were able to choose what types of project to work on. The first group chose to buy and look after plants at the Stevenage Wellbeing Centre. The second group chose to make mosaic panels and willow sculptures in the Triangle Community Garden, Hitchin. The third group chose to learn how to grow fruit and vegetables.

The plants have really cheered up the centre – it’s great to see the flash of colour on the stairs. (Growing Clearer Minds participant)
Growing Ourselves Through a Plot of Land

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Eastfeast
Sudbury, Suffolk
01473 226 789
info@eastfeast.co.uk
eastfeast.co.uk

Eastfeast is a team of professional gardeners, artists and teachers that helps schools deliver more effective learning through working an allotment through the seasons. They work with students and teachers to develop the outdoor classroom, cultivating shared learning about the world in which we live through food and art.

Ecominds funding has enabled Eastfeast to develop Growing Ourselves Through a Plot of Land – a project providing work-based rehabilitation for people experiencing mental health problems. Eastfeast has partnered with several organisations to deliver the project, including Workwise and the Sudbury Learning Resource Centre, Babergh District Council and St Elizabeth Court Housing Association.

Participants work to develop a community garden at the easily accessible Sudbury Resource Centre, enabling them to develop social skills, confidence, self-esteem, and skills and qualifications to progress into employment, further education or voluntary work.

Through structured weekly sessions, participants are involved in making raised beds, preparing land, and planting, growing and selling local produce. The sessions also provide them with transferable skills to aid their employability, including skills in ICT, digital photography, record-keeping, presentations, teamwork, resilience and responsibility.

We held events to gather feedback from the local community about their perception of the project, and of mental health issues. At these events, many members of the community shared feelings about their own mental health.

(Eastfeast staff member)
Great Yarmouth Community Trust is a multi-purpose, neighbourhood-based, community enterprise set up by local people in 2001 to support the area’s Sure Start programme. Funded by Ecominds, their Whoops a Daisy! project trained a group of people in indoor gardening, with a view to them becoming horticulture volunteers. After completing their training, participants worked with residents in local residential homes and sheltered housing to share their new knowledge and skills, helping people to cultivate indoor garden areas. They showed residents and staff how to care for, maintain and nurture their plants.

Great Yarmouth Community Trust collaborated with Great Yarmouth and Waveney Mind, and the local Stroke Association to deliver the project.

During the course of the project, participants expressed the wish to learn more about herbs. To respond to this, the project team worked with the local library to arrange workshops where participants learned about growing and cooking herbs and the health benefits of eating them.

The project worked to overcome stereotypes. Participants were encouraged to share their knowledge and experiences to improve mutual awareness of each other’s needs, leading to them feeling valued and more confident. Although the project has come to an end, participants continue to give positive feedback about their indoor gardening experiences.
Wildlife Ambassadors provides people who are not in employment, education and training (NEET) with opportunities to gain wildlife conservation experience to increase their employability. Participants attend a six-week course and obtain skills in habitat management, species identification, surveying and monitoring.

Although the Wildlife Ambassadors project has now come to a close, Froglife will continue to develop concepts from the projects into future funding bids.

**Case study**

Graham has been one of the biggest successes of the Wildlife Ambassadors project to date. At the age of five Graham became a young carer to his father, looking after him for 15 years until he passed when Graham was 19. After his father’s death, Graham started to experience depression and anxiety, which led to a mental health crisis. He ended up homeless on the street where he suffered from an overdose.

*I’ve loved everything I’ve done with Wildlife Ambassadors so much, I’ve learnt loads about reptiles and amphibians and made tons of friends. Without the project I wouldn’t have got my new job as a carer at a care home.* (Graham, Wildlife Ambassador)

Graham has volunteered 184 hours to Wildlife Ambassadors and Froglife and this is a wonderful achievement. His confidence has grown throughout the project, and this has led to him find employment doing a job he loves… It’s great to know we have helped him achieve his goals. (Member of the Wildlife Ambassadors project team)

The project worked with 80 Wildlife Ambassadors, who improved six local green spaces. While developing their personal skills in wildlife and conservation they built wildlife ponds, created new habitats and improved access to the sites.
The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) works with people and communities to transform their health, prospects and communities for the long term. The charity’s Wellbeing Comes Naturally programme has supported over 1,000 people with experience of mental health problems to become valued, active members of conservation groups.

In locations across England, TCV connects people with nature and each other, supporting their personal development by enabling greater participation in meaningful volunteering activities. The groups are diverse and offer a wide range of activities, for example food growing, habitat restoration and heritage preservation. TCV trains participants to take on roles of responsibility in the practical delivery of volunteer tasks, and in the organisation, management and promotion of their group. By integrating people into the groups and supporting them to take on additional roles, they build their skills, social networks and confidence.

I really look forward to coming to the allotment. I feel more confident talking to people. I feel more healthy.
(Blaise, Wellbeing Comes Naturally participant)

An independent evaluation showed that Wellbeing Comes Naturally had the following impact on its participants:
- reduced tension and stress
- improved ability to cope with mental health difficulties
- improved mood
- weight-loss and increased stamina and fitness
- greater confidence and sociability
- enhanced personal motivation.

I feel more confident now and would like to try and continue doing conservation work. I am thinking of doing some volunteering somewhere else in the country and maybe next year I would like to volunteer abroad. I still have a lot of changes to make before I am happy but it feels achievable now.
(Wellbeing Comes Naturally participant)

What next?
TCV envisages a network of Green Gyms in schools, workplaces, and communities, with teams working together to reclaim green places for all and to achieve stronger, healthier environments. Green Gyms enhance people’s wellbeing and resilience, and increase their skills and confidence, leading to enhanced social lives, better prospects and meaningful activity. Green Gyms help people to stay well, physically fitter, and more mentally resilient, making them less likely to use the services and budgets of the already stretched health system.
A Therapeutic Garden Retreat

Social and therapeutic horticulture

Lead organisation: Central and Cecil Housing Trust

Ealing, London

ccht.org.uk

Central and Cecil is a not-for-profit registered provider of housing, care and support to vulnerable people. Its Leamington Park housing scheme supports people experiencing mental health problems. Tenants receive individual support and participate in artistic and therapeutic activities.

Ecominds funding enabled a group of four tenants, supported by Groundwork, to work together to transform an empty space between buildings into a welcoming garden. Participants worked as a team to create a design for the garden. They prepared the ground, extended the terrace, planted over 450 spring bulbs and an array of fruit trees, built a greenhouse, constructed a chaise longue out of turf, and renovated the garden furniture.

The shared garden is now used for solitary activities and social activities such as barbecues. A bamboo screen has been erected around the garden, further enhancing its function as a secure and private place to relax. Tenants continue to benefit from the garden by engaging in social and therapeutic activities that enhance their wellbeing and their sense of community.

Gardening is hard work but it’s rewarding. I feel like the project has improved my job prospects and I might like to become a professional gardener in the future. (Anthony Crick, Leamington Park resident)

The project helped me a lot – being out in the open air. (Peter Donolon, Leamington Park resident)

One resident enjoyed the project so much he went on to study a Practical Gardening Level 1 course at Capel Manor College. The project increased the sense of community within the scheme, and tenants continue to enjoy healthier eating thanks to the herbs and vegetables from the greenhouse.
Battersea Pathways

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Thrive
Battersea, London
020 7720 2212
battersea@thrive.org.uk
thrive.org.uk

Thrive is the leading charity in the UK using gardening to change the lives of disabled people. Ecominds funding enabled the Battersea Pathways project to offer people experiencing enduring mental health problems a stepping stone to independent community engagement.

The project used therapeutic gardening to help participants overcome barriers to independent community engagement and gain the knowledge and skills necessary to become a community volunteer. Participants worked in small groups supported by a Thrive horticultural therapist to create and maintain community green spaces.

The Battersea Pathways group worked to create a small healthy living garden at New Covent Garden Vegetable Market to engage local schools and community members.

What next?
The project established a regular community volunteer gardening group which has taken on the long-term maintenance of the garden. As well as fostering community engagement the ongoing project aims to promote awareness and reduce stigma associated with mental health problems.
Community Options is a leading mental health charity in London and the South East working to support people experiencing mental health problems to work towards recovery and lead valued lives in their communities. The charity’s Branching Out project engaged people in gardening and outdoor activities as part of a carefully structured recovery programme.

Participants enrolled on an accredited horticultural course and reflect on their progress through life-planning sessions at the start, middle and end of their course.

Alongside the course, participants are supported by staff from Bromley Mind to complete a personal Outcome Star and a Recovery Star. The stars look at ten areas of an individual’s life and asks them to reflect on where they are now and how they would like to progress. People complete a star when they begin the project and make an action plan for the change they would like to see. The participants review their progress after three and six months.

Following the course, the participants are sign-posted to a range of community groups and volunteering and employment opportunities available in the area.

What next?
Branching Out continues to work with the community and ‘friends of parks’ groups to improve local green spaces and increase awareness of mental health. The next phase of the project will establish Branching Out as a social enterprise, making ecotherapy opportunities available to a greater number of people.

An independent evaluation reviewed project data for participants and found:

- 9 out of 10 people directly involved with Branching Out felt their involvement had maintained or had a positive impact on their mental health
- 9 out of 10 participants felt their involvement maintained or had a positive outcome on their physical health
- nine per cent of the participants have been successful at securing paid work since completing Branching Out and 32% of other participants have gone on to a volunteer role including returning to volunteer with Branching Out
The Budding Together project provided opportunities for adults to get involved in wildlife and environmental conservation activities at Camley Street Natural Park, Kings Cross, London, and others across the city. Participants had the opportunity to develop their skills in a range of practical conservation and horticultural tasks, including undertaking species-surveying activities and contributing to the protection of the capital's wild spaces.

Although the project was informal in its set-up and not accredited, it followed an NVQ structure, giving participants experience of what it is like to follow an accredited course of study. This structure encouraged participants to develop skills and offered them a route forward at the end of the project.

Experienced participants were encouraged to mentor new ones by sharing their skills, knowledge and enthusiasm. All were encouraged to get involved in other London Wildlife Trust programmes and benefit from the wide range of opportunities available across London.

Participants with a range of mental health problems benefited from taking part in the wildlife and environmental conservation activities. The activities had an overwhelmingly positive effect on participants, improving their mental health and wellbeing through access to nature in the green spaces of inner London. The project built the confidence of participants, enabling them to move on to other opportunities.

- Participants improved access and enhanced the biodiversity at 13 green spaces in London.
- The project supported 80 people with mental health problems.
- Six participants took on supervisory roles within the project.
- Nine participants benefiting from mentoring by other London Wildlife Trust volunteers.

**It gives me the opportunity to turn off from some of the things that are going on in my life and to think about nature and the environment for a while. It gives me some breathing space.**
(Budding Together participant)

**What next?**

London Wildlife Trust continues to involve volunteers in all aspects of its work. Volunteer opportunities exist at Camley Street Natural Park in Kings Cross (where the Budding Together project ran) and at other sites across London, including the trust's central office.
St Mary’s Secret Garden is a horticultural project in Hackney, London. This small secret garden is often described as a peaceful oasis in the middle of a very busy and densely populated urban area. The Changing Minds project provided an opportunity for people with mental health problems to design and create an outdoor space within the garden. Participants benefited from the opportunities that gardening offers for healing and wellbeing.

When I’m in the garden I can forget my stresses and learn to be more balanced. (Changing Minds participant)

Overcoming challenges in the garden helped me grow. (Changing Minds participant)

What next?
The new garden created by the Changing Minds project has already been used for a number of community and social events. A new group of people with mental health problems are now involved in its upkeep. Several of the original group of gardeners have continued to drop in to help maintain the garden, to finish their training or join other training projects.

The garden is used by people from across the local community. Most people who access services are from disadvantaged groups, and include adults with learning disabilities and those with mental health problems.
City and Hackney Mind Gardening Club

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: City and Hackney Mind
Hackney, London
020 8985 4239
cityandhackneymind.org.uk

The City and Hackney Mind Gardening Club enabled people with mental health problems to learn, share and develop the skills and confidence required to grow vegetables and flowers in an inner-city environment.

Participants gained skills and confidence to volunteer at local community gardens, including the garden at City and Hackney Mind, where their activity has created a tranquil, courtyard-style space for everyone to enjoy.

What next?
The project has resulted in a regular gardening club, which meets every Friday and continues to tend and develop the garden spaces at City and Hackney Mind’s offices.

It has made me feel better and more confident.
It was a very relaxing and worthwhile activity and made me feel rewarded when I saw results. (Gardening Club participants)

Feedback suggests that the opportunity to meet with others in a safe place over a shared activity was very beneficial to participants. Many people reported reduced feelings of isolation and improved wellbeing.
Core Landscapes

Social and therapeutic horticulture

Lead organisation: Core Arts

Hackney, London

020 8986 3080

corearts.co.uk

/coreartshackney

Core Arts is a charity that promotes access and participation in the arts as a way of challenging with the stigma of mental health problems. Since May 2010, Core Arts has managed its Core Landscapes project on a site made temporarily vacant by the development of Canning Town. The project engages local disadvantaged people – particularly those experiencing mental health problems – in environmental projects that promote wellbeing and local social change.

The site contains a horticultural nursery which is run as a social enterprise, a large play area and several allotment container spaces. The project offers horticultural training and work experience to participants who are at the heart of the enterprise’s planning and delivery. 16 local groups use the site and these include ex-offenders, the homeless, women’s groups, children’s groups, local Scout groups and disabled groups. Core Landscapes works to address and overcome barriers that prevent people with complex needs from realising their potential. The project supports them to establish social networks and become economically active.

What next?

The project will continue to grow at a new three-acre temporary site secured from the Greater London Authority in Silvertown Way, Canning Town.

I’ve been helping for a couple of months and I find it really rewarding. You know you’ve done something positive... it makes you feel good. For me it’s win win.

(Core Landscapes participant)

Core Landscapes won second place in Capital Growth’s 2012 Growing for Gold Awards
Richmond Mind’s Cultivating Minds project helps people experiencing mental health problems to benefit from horticulture and green spaces as part of their recovery. The project offers a programme of relaxing and therapeutic activities at Richmond Mind’s Crane Park allotment. The project team uses a metaphor of growth to support all participants, training them in horticulture and the natural environment in a safe, nurturing arena.

Richmond Mind also develops volunteering opportunities in the community through its Green Avengers group. The project has also offered horticultural activities to patients on the local acute psychiatric ward.

By working with partner organisations and engaging members of the community through open days and other events, Cultivating Minds raises awareness and increases understanding of mental health.

What next?
Richmond Mind has recruited a new project officer to engage more people in Cultivating Minds. The project team is exploring potential corporate partnerships and other forms of fundraising with a view to making the project self-sustainable.

I’m diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. Digging, planting and growing flowers and vegetables has made me feel I can achieve something – as well as improving my concentration. Getting to know the other people in the group made me realise they were not out to get me. (Cultivating Minds participant)
Sydenham Garden is an award-winning local charity that aims to transform lives through therapeutic activities. The charity offers a range of events and opportunities to the local community, with a focus on Lewisham and Bromley residents with mental health problems or other significant illnesses. Participants can improve their quality of life, social interaction and physical and mental health within a supportive community environment.

Ecominds funding enabled Sydenham Garden to expand its services to benefit more people and to provide participants with opportunities to decide the direction of the project, supporting them to take on leadership roles. The funding also enabled Sydenham Garden to engage a wider segment of the local community in its environmental sustainability activities, in partnership with other organisations.

Coming to Sydenham Garden has made a huge difference to me and helped me get back on my feet. (Sydenham Garden participant)

What next?
Sydenham Gardens plans to run sessions for over 150 participants in 2013 and 2014. It has expanded its offer to include a project for people with early onset dementia and a programme of short courses such as craft, cookery and wellbeing workshops.

During their placement at Sydenham Gardens:
- over 200 participants gained qualifications
- 140 participants reported improvements in their health
Forty Hall Vineyard is an innovative social enterprise – a commercially scaled vineyard on a working organic farm. It is led and managed by volunteers, with the support of a part-time project manager.

With Ecominds funding, Fine @ the Vine engaged people experiencing mental health problems in a range of activities including vineyard management (planting, pruning, weeding, harvesting), fruit and vegetable growing on a dedicated allotment, orchard work, animal care, composting, conservation work and wildlife surveys.

What next?
Forty Hall Vineyard’s ecotherapy work has been able to continue with funding from the London Borough of Enfield. The vineyard has completed more work targeted at Asian women with mental health support needs, local families under stress, and adults with learning difficulties who are isolated and experiencing depression. The vineyard is currently working with Forty Hall Farm to apply for Big Lottery Fund funding for future ecotherapy work that would use the farm and vineyard as learning resources.

I have had a complete change of lifestyle – from a TV junkie to an outgoing, outside person. I have even lost my beer belly! (Fine @ the Vine participant)

Before attending this project I was feeling isolated, lonely and depressed. These few weeks of outdoor activities have improved my health, depression and even stabilised my hypertension. (Fine @ the Vine participant)

- The project engaged 160 people.
- A survey of participants revealed overwhelmingly positive feedback.
- 63% felt more connected to nature.
- 86% enjoyed working outdoors.
- 73% felt more able to meet and talk to new people.
- 73% felt interested in and inspired by the project activities.
- Several participants have become volunteers at the vineyard or with other outdoor organisations.
- Forty Hall Vineyard developed relationships with over 10 local referrers (link workers and mental health organisations) that are keen to continue their involvement.
Forest Farm Peace Garden is a community food-growing project working to promote health, wellbeing, cultural awareness and environmental sustainability. The two-acre permaculture garden is run by volunteers from the local community, including many with mental health problems as well as refugees, asylum seekers and people with learning difficulties.

Ecominds funding enabled Forest Farm Peace Garden to provide more support to volunteers by setting up a buddy scheme. Buddies are regular volunteers who are trained to welcome and support new volunteers and those with extra support needs, particularly people with mental health problems.

As soon as you come here, even without doing anything, you feel the peace, and you take that away with you. People who know me are seeing the change in me. I used to cry a lot – but not anymore.

(Forest Farm Peace Garden participant)

The Peace Garden provides a safe space where people can spend time in nature, learn new skills and produce healthy food to take home. It’s also a place where participants can meet and develop social skills by working and relaxing together. Volunteers have constant support of staff and the buddies. They can progress at their own pace, gradually integrating into the group by working alone or with others, and choosing tasks they feel comfortable with.

Forest Farm Peace Garden has secured funding to continue its therapeutic gardening programme. The project team has trained a new team of buddies and have taken on more volunteers with support needs. They are particularly focussing on development opportunities for all of their volunteers – for those with support needs and for those giving support. Based on feedback received from project participants, Forest Farm Peace Garden is running training and skill-shares, and providing opportunities for volunteers to take on leadership roles.
Ecominds funding has enabled Forest Recycling Project (FRP) to develop an eco-volunteering programme, through existing partnerships with North East London Foundation Trust, and other local health and social care providers. The programme supports people in primary and secondary care to take up volunteering opportunities as a way of improving their mental health.

The programme provides environmental volunteering opportunities for people with mental health problems and supports participants to access development opportunities over a range of initiatives, including:

• office recycling services
• collection, sorting and distribution of reusable goods
• delivery of waste exchange
• awareness-raising Give or Take events
• creating products from recycled materials.

FRP has worked closely with partner organisation The Hornbeam Centre to establish a network of volunteers and local environmental organisations. The knowledge and experience gained through this network and through partnerships with local health services has enabled The Hornbeam Centre to become an eco-volunteering hub. The centre works to place people in environmental roles that are beneficial to them.

FRP benefits from well-established referral routes through health and social service agencies and voluntary sector organisations. In addition to volunteering opportunities, FRP has helped food growing cooperative OrganicLea to establish a hugely successful volunteering programme at its site at Hawkwood Nursery, Chingford.

To promote inclusivity, volunteer opportunities at FRP are not specifically promoted as being for people with mental health problems or for vulnerable adults. People approach the project from a wide range of backgrounds and for different reasons.

By providing environmental volunteering opportunities, the project has enabled people with mental health problems to build confidence, reduce social exclusion, develop skills and experience, and make a positive contribution to society. During the Ecominds funding period:

• the project directly involved 185 beneficiaries, enabling them to improve their physical and mental wellbeing through volunteering
• 61 referral organisations sent volunteers to the project, with some making multiple referrals
• 27 mental health agencies referred people to the project
• FRP established a network of 13 partner projects offering volunteering opportunities
• the project helped the Hornbeam Centre to develop its own eco-volunteering programme and become a local broker for eco-volunteering.

It can be very difficult for projects to offer high levels of support to volunteers. Forest Recycling Project offers genuine and meaningful opportunities to be part of the community. (Volunteer Centre Manager, Redbridge CVS)

What next?
Backed by an eco-volunteering action plan and fundraising strategy, FRP has secured additional funding for the project and will continue to make further applications to a variety of funding streams. FRP also generates its own income, helping to sustain the programme.
The Fresh in Mind project supported 20 people experiencing mental health problems to improve their local environment by transforming a piece of derelict land into a sensory garden. Participants were encouraged to get involved in all stages of the project, which ended with the opening of the garden in February 2012. Situated at Mind in Bexley’s premises, the space is now a therapeutic community resource that increases people’s connection with the natural world and is used throughout the year.

At the end of the project, participants created a photographic exhibition, Grow Flowers Grow, as a visual documentary highlighting each stage of the project. They also produced a film highlighting the impact that the scheme has had on participants’ mental wellbeing. As a result of the garden’s success of the therapeutic garden, the group has subsequently established a community allotment.

Participants reported on the positive impact of their involvement with Fresh in Mind, which included:

- better physical health
- increased social connectedness
- reduced isolation
- increased ability to relax
- improved mood
- heightened self-esteem
- increased confidence
- improved self-sufficiency.

Research into the Fresh in Mind project indicates that it has had far-reaching benefits, helping to prevent deterioration in mental health and providing value for money.

What next?

Fresh in Mind has developed into an expert, self-managed, mutual support programme. The findings of a research study on Fresh in Mind will be transformed into a public exhibition, to be displayed at local venues, which will raise awareness of mental health and the benefits of ecotherapy.

Mind in Bexley has worked to ensure that its ecotherapy schemes are an integral part of its soon-to-be-launched social enterprise café, and will continue to liaise with the London Borough of Bexley to secure additional allotment space. Mind in Bexley will also be working closely with GPs on its Ecotherapy on Prescription campaign. The campaign aims to ensure that ecotherapy options are available to local people experiencing mental health problems.

I just completely disappear into what I’m doing. It’s like I switch off…everything is poured into the plants. That’s when I’m blissfully happy. It’s wonderful to feel that I have a purpose – you feel such an uplift. (Jay, Fresh in Mind participant)
The Commonside Community Development Trust (CCDT) works to improve the lives and environment of people living in the London Borough of Merton. It manages a community centre, hosts community events and runs a programme of community development activities.

The trust’s Get Fit, Stay Well project provides outdoor gym exercise, local interest walks and gardening opportunities for people with mental health problems. The project worked with local people to promote outdoor exercise in the Pollards Hill, East Mitcham and North Croydon areas, organising local walks, and gardening activities. The project makes use of a range of outdoor gym equipment and local green spaces. Running groups are supported by a fitness trainer who encourages people to exercise regularly.

The project built relationships with local organisations enabling the trust to promote ecotherapy, increase knowledge and standard of service, and broaden the range of services offered at its community centre.

I am really happy coming to the centre to help in the garden. I keep the special trees watered and clear the litter.

(Get Fit, Stay Well participant)

We help people to get to know the local area better. They enjoy being out and about in it.

(Get Fit, Stay Well project team member)

The project has encouraged CCDT to develop creative ways of reaching and engaging people. CCDT staff and volunteers are now more knowledgeable, confident and confidence-inspiring when they meet or work with someone who has experience of mental health problems.

What next?

CCDT is developing its community centre garden, growing fruit and vegetables to sell to the public and use to supply a community lunch club for older people. Ecotherapy is now embedded as part of the charity’s strategy to improve the local area.
Green Therapy for Survivors of Torture

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Freedom from Torture
Islington, London
020 7697 7777
freedomfromtorture.org

Freedom from Torture runs treatment centres in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle and Glasgow, and a small partnership service in Yorkshire and Humberside, for survivors of torture in the UK.

The Green Therapy project (now the Natural Growth project) is based in the charity’s London Treatment Centre. Referral for the service is via a standard application form which can be found on the Freedom from Torture website, and referrals are accepted from survivors of torture and organised violence only.

Green Therapy uses the medium of nature to rehabilitate seriously traumatised men and women. It works on the principle that everyone has a relationship with nature and that by re-establishing a link with the natural world a torture survivor can reconnect with life. The project runs three psychotherapy groups and two horticultural groups that meet weekly either at the London Treatment Centre or at the nearby Colindale Allotment. The project implements a range of approaches including a therapeutic group work model, one-to-one therapy in a group setting, intensive psychotherapy approaches and gardening to improve mental wellbeing.

At night, there is too much pain, but when you’re here you’re busy with other things and you forget your problems for a few hours. When I go home, I keep thinking about what I planted, what I’ll do next week, what I talked to people about.
(Green Therapy participant)

What next?
The charity continues to offer therapeutic horticulture to survivors of torture and to foster links with other organisations. A review of activities is underway as a result of the evaluation recommendations, which will inform how services are provided in the future.

Independent evaluation explored how the project assisted participants to recover and increased their wellbeing. The evaluation reported five main areas of change in participants:

- increased energy or improved mood
- increased sense of agency, or ability to influence the world
- increased sociability
- improved physical wellbeing
- acquisition of new skills.

The evaluation found that the activity of gardening offered many opportunities for clients to make decisions and to see the consequences of their decision-making and actions. Engagement with the natural world was therapeutic for many participants. They said the feeling of being outdoors, in an open space, surrounded by nature, made them relax and feel happy and this benefited their psychological and physical wellbeing.
Grounded Ecotherapy

Social and therapeutic horticulture

Lead organisation: Providence Row Housing Association
Tower Hamlets, Hackney, City of London
020 7920 7328 | 020 7920 7324
info@prha.net
prha.net

Providence Row Housing Association (PRHA) works with adults with co-occurring substance misuse and mental health support needs. PRHA’s established mental health and wellbeing project, Grounded Ecotherapy, uses physical work as an aid to recovery and rehabilitation and provides participants with a first step back to work. In September 2010, Ecominds funding enabled PRHA to form an ecotherapy team to add a gardening and therapeutic element to its existing Grounded project.

Grounded Ecotherapy sessions are driven by participants. Two horticultural teachers, who have experience of addiction and mental health problems, act as role models. Participants can apply to become volunteers or mentors, to assume formal positions in the team, receive staff training and attend the steering group that oversees project planning and development. The project has built strong links with local environmental charities including the Eden Project and local organisations such as the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park. These relationships have opened up opportunities for work in other areas of London which recently saw the team’s skills being used on the restoration of Victoria Park.

What next?

Operating in East London, and from the Queen Elizabeth roof garden at Southbank, Providence Row Housing Association continues to provide a range of horticultural learning from woodland management, wildlife conservation, allotment-growing, show gardens and hard landscaping.

Future projects include building gardens for schools, carrying out grounds maintenance for housing providers, and hosting corporate challenge days.

Grounded has helped me to meet lots of people and make friends.  
(Grounded Ecotherapy participant)

Going gardening gets me out of my flat and gives me something to do with the day.  
(Grounded Ecotherapy participant)

Six long-term unemployed participants with a history of mental health problems and substance misuse have found paid employment and are living independently, helped by having taken part in meaningful volunteering.
Growing in Mind

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Brent Mind
Wembley, London
020 7604 5173
brentmind.org.uk

The Growing in Mind volunteer allotment project engaged people with mental health problems in horticultural activities one day a week. From a site first described as “a jungle”, the group built a solid shed, eight raised beds and planted a range of fruit trees.

Participants learned how to mix compost and manure into the London clay soil, so that nutrients could get to the plants’ roots. For those who were unable to work on the allotment site, the group devised a Home Grown programme where seeds were nurtured indoors for future planting at the allotment. Brent Council’s Parks team was very supportive of the project, helping to publicise events.

I’ve made two new friends. I’ve not had a real friend in years.
(Growing in Mind participant)

What next?
Brent Mind has trained peer support volunteers to help sustain the project. Thanks to a partnership with Capel Manor College, and the support of the Sports and Recreations team at Brent Council, further funding has been sourced to enable the allotment to open three to four days a week.

Growing in Mind engaged 40 participants at the allotment site, all of whom had histories of severe and enduring mental health problems.

A further 12 participants (most of whom could not get to the site due to anxiety issues) engaged via the Home Grown programme.

It was lovely seeing pictures of the tomatoes that I started growing, all red and fat.
(Growing in Mind Home Grown participant)

It took a long time to clear the site – it could only be described as a jungle. We almost expected David Attenborough to appear from the undergrowth at any time.
(Project team member)
Growing Skills

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Trees for Cities
Kennington, London
020 7840 5957
EmmaHolland@treesforcities.org
treesforcities.org

Trees for Cities works with communities to plant trees in parts of cities that need it most, growing stronger neighbourhoods, enhancing urban landscapes and improving health and happiness. The charity’s Growing Skills project provides horticultural training to help people with mental health problems achieve qualifications and move towards secure employment.

Trainees are treated as part of the team and learn in a fun and supportive environment. They benefit from 13 weeks of horticultural training, practical landscaping and life-skills development. Participation is recognised at the end of the course through an award, certificate, or Level 1 NVQ.

What next?
The project will continue to provide support for young adults with mental health problems for at least another two years. It will specifically target young people aged between 18 and 25, from disadvantaged backgrounds, whose mental health may have been a barrier to them achieving qualifications or employment.

Since completing Level 1 with Trees for Cities in March, I joined an agency, signed off the dole in April, and have not looked back. The practical side of gardening is great for mental health problems, and it has really helped me. I still have the odd day where I disappear, but this is getting much less frequent. It’s great to be able to take out my frustrations on the soil by digging holes and concentrating on hard physical work.

(Growing Skills participant)

Being outdoors every day can have a profoundly positive impact on people’s mental health. Participants were asked to rank their wellbeing out of 5 for a variety of indicators at both the beginning and the end of the course. All 20 Ecominds-funded trainees ranked 0.5 to 1 point higher at the end of the course than they did at the beginning, demonstrating the positive impact it had on their lives.
The HYPOD project worked in partnership with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Dalston Eastern Curve Garden to transform two urban settings into cultivated spaces. Ecominds funding enabled the project to support 181 young people under the age of 25 to gain practical outdoor skills, share experiences and feel connected to the outdoors. HYPOD also offered participants the chance to become involved in Off Centre’s mentoring project, where they were trained and paid to offer advice and support to young people in Hackney.

The project published a booklet of recipes, created by young participants. The booklet is widely available in the local community and for purchase in Hackney cafés, shops and organisations supporting local produce. The booklet also raises awareness of Off Centre and promotes its services to potential referrers.
Marsh Hill Project is a 30-bed supported housing project managed by Look Ahead Housing and Care. It offers two year placements to adults experiencing mental health problems who receive support to develop and improve their independence. The project offers wider support to residents through its links with the community education, advice, employment and health services.

The Nature and Nurture project supported residents to create a piece of public art on the Marsh Hill grounds, facilitated by the artist Mandee Gage. During the process of planning and making the artwork, participants discussed their thoughts about health, self-care and care of the environment. The main aims of the project were to encourage self-expression, to provide creative routes for expressing inner feelings, and to develop self-confidence and community involvement.

The completed work is a permanent art installation featuring gardening, sculpture and pottery.

Nature and Nurture project helped me get on with my life and do something different. It gave me direction. (Nature and Nurture participant)

I like making things and working with plants. The project gave me an opportunity to spend more time with my friends, and to make new ones. (Nature and Nurture participant)
London Wildlife Trust manages over forty nature reserve sites across London that are exemplars of urban conservation land management and engage the local communities using the sites. PLANT! (Peckham Learning and Nature Team) enabled adults with mental health problems to access a programme of three-month outdoor placements. The project targeted people from local BME communities, some of whom were refugees or asylum seekers.

Based at the London Wildlife Trust’s Centre for Wildlife Gardening (CWG), located behind a quiet residential street in Peckham, the project ran between November 2010 and November 2011.

Participants were engaged in a range of activities based on their interests and abilities including:

- garden maintenance: making compost, clearing, digging, sowing seeds, nurturing and harvesting vegetables and other plants
- practical conservation work and environmental activities at other local green spaces: tree planting, wildlife identification, nature walks
- environmental and culture-based arts activities providing participants with a creative outlet
- regular, themed events that raised awareness of mental health in the community.

The project engaged 28 participants, many of whom were from local BME communities.

Participants benefited from food growing, wildlife and environmental conservation activities in relaxing and supportive outdoor surroundings.

Participants reported that integrating with the local community through nature and green space had a positive effect, improving their mental health.

What next?

London Wildlife Trust continues to involve volunteers in all aspects of its work. Volunteer opportunities exist at their staffed sites, including the Centre for Wildlife Gardening in Southwark (where the PLANT! project ran) and other sites across London.
PoLLeN

Social and therapeutic horticulture  
Lead organisation: Bromley by Bow Centre  
Bromley by Bow, London  
020 8709 9714 | 077 6323 7518  
bbbc.org.uk/pages/pollen.html  
@PoLLeN_BbBC

People, Life, Landscape & Nature (PoLLeN) is a social and therapeutic horticulture project for adults with mental health problems. The aim of the project is to improve mental and physical wellbeing through a closer engagement with nature. The mental distress referral criteria include: stress, anxiety, panic attacks, agitation, low mood, low self-esteem and confidence, inability to cope with day-to-day life, poor motivation and low expectations.

At the heart of PoLLeN is a weekly programme of horticultural activities, such as vegetable growing, flower cultivation and garden maintenance, woodland and wildlife gardening, and creative ones combining elements of landscape and nature.

The project seeks to develop people’s skills and employment opportunities, increase their social networks and integration into the local community, create a better sense of community ownership of the sites, and improve the local environment.

Research by Professor Stephen Clift of the Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health revealed how PoLLeN participants felt about the project. Of the participants surveyed:

- 95% reported feeling happier after taking part in the project
- 85% feel increased levels of confidence
- 85% have experienced a reduction in feelings of social isolation and loneliness
- 35% have gained qualifications
- 30% have gained employment.

What next?
The project team is exploring funding opportunities by a range of statutory organisations and trusts. An application to the Heritage Lottery Fund’s Parks for People grant stream is also underway. The proposed project, developed in consultation with current PoLLeN participants, would connect vulnerable people to local heritage sites in engaging, accessible, safe and fun ways. Funding will allow PoLLeN to continue to work with its existing group of participants, and maintain the core sessions that have been so successful and popular during the past three years. PoLLeN will aim to deliver the City & Guilds Level 1 in Practical Horticulture Skills, and is exploring delivering Level 2 in Work-Based Horticulture with a partner organisation.

Over the last few years, I have watched the park flourish and develop into a beautiful place to go. I love taking my grandchildren to the park and one of their favourite places is the flower garden. (Local resident)
Homelessness charity St Mungo’s has been providing horticultural training opportunities for homeless people for over ten years. Ecominds funding enabled St Mungo’s to employ a mental health gardener trainer to work with homeless and vulnerable people with mental health problems.

The trainer supports participants to improve their lives and mental wellbeing through gardening. Working in hostel gardens as well as the St Mungo’s allotment, participants have the opportunity to learn new skills, gain OCN qualifications and build positive relationships. Being active in the outdoors has proven to be hugely beneficial to project participants. During the winter months when the weather keeps them indoors, they learn about plant physiology.

It has made me feel happier being around nature. (Local resident)

What next?
Putting Down Roots has been awarded Supporting Impact funding from The Big Lottery Fund to continue for another year. By December 2013 another 40 homeless people will have participated in the project.

St Mungo’s is exploring potential avenues for income generation with a view to making the project self-sustainable, such as taking on gardening maintenance contracts and setting up a ‘Grow to Sell’ initiative. The long-term plan for the project is to support participants to run their own gardening groups, to provide gardening training to their peers, and to manage the cultivation and sale of crops.

27 of 127 project participants (21%) have gone on to further volunteering or employment.
PHASES is a social enterprise helping people to move away from homelessness into learning and work. The organisation’s projects enable homeless people to learn DIY and construction skills by working on disused buildings.

The Recycling Space project taught construction and gardening skills to 15 homeless people with mental health problems. Ecominds funding enabled the hiring of two part-time trainers.

Participants learned skills in plaster-boarding, carpentry, plastering, painting and decorating, by working on the renovation of two sites: a former lock-up shop with a three bedroom flat attached in Rotherhithe, and a former workhouse in Kennington. The Rotherhithe building had been empty for two years. Participants renovated the flat, improved the garden space and converted the former shop area into a training room. At The Old Lambeth Workhouse in Kennington, participants developed two garden areas: a formal garden and a wildlife garden.

It was great to get outside and get my hands dirty. (Recycling Space participant)

What next?

PHASES continues to run construction skills projects for homeless people and other marginalised groups. A number of their current trainees experience mental health problems. Since the conclusion of their Ecominds project, PHASES has secured funding of £238,000 from DCLG (Department for Communities and Local Government) for the period 2012-15 to renovate nine empty properties in South East London. During this period, PHASES aims to help 50 trainees per year towards further learning and work.
Roots n Boots

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Peter Bedford Housing Association (PBHA)
Islington and Hackney, London
020 7923 9255
peterbedford.org.uk

PBHA provides housing, vocational and community services to people from socially excluded backgrounds including those with mental health problems. The Roots n Boots project supported PBHA tenants, service users and local volunteers to develop nine communal garden sites in Islington and Hackney. The project worked to increase community use and ownership of the outdoor spaces.

Participants were supported alongside volunteers from University of Third Age (U3A), who provided mentoring and hands-on gardening support. They developed new skills in horticulture and built relationships with other residents and members of the local community. Roots n Boots activities included practical and creative workshops in food growing, nature care and use of natural materials.

A dedicated horticultural officer and a project coordinator worked together to recruit and retain project participants, providing coordinated activities in a supportive environment. The project team linked in with other local volunteering and training opportunities, enabling participants to benefit from inspirational field trips and ten funded places on a horticulture course at St Mary’s Secret Garden.
Seed to Succeed

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Crisis
Shoreditch, London
020 7426 3834
paula.lonergan@crisis.org.uk
crisis.org.uk

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people, dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change. The charity’s Seed to Succeed food growing project was funded by Ecominds and delivered in partnership with the Attlee Youth and Community Centre.

The project used food growing as a tool to improve the mental health, physical wellbeing and knowledge and skills of homeless and vulnerably housed people. Participants were supported to cultivate fruit and vegetables in a garden plot at the centre. Project activities ran over the course of four ten-week terms per year, on Mondays from 12pm to 4pm. At the end of each session, the group cooked and ate a nutritious meal made from the garden’s produce.

What next?
Due to its popularity and success, Seed to Succeed will continue after the lifetime of the Ecominds funding. Future plans for the project include populating a new greenhouse and installing new raised beds.

I find it relaxing working in a horticultural environment – being at one with nature. (Seed to Succeed participant)

Meeting people and having somewhere to go on a regular basis is always important. (Seed to Succeed participant)

The project engaged 39 homeless participants over two years. They learned new skills, improved their confidence, made friends and shared the fruits of their labour by cooking and eating together each week.
Urban Growth

Social and therapeutic horticulture

Lead organisation: Jobs in Mind

Camden, London

020 7281 8097

jobsinmind.org/services/recovery-and-training-services/urban-growth/

Jobs in Mind supports people to recover from mental health problems. It helps employees to resolve problems and retain employment, and supports unemployed people to return to work. The Urban Growth project supports the recovery, social and vocational inclusion of young people and adults experiencing mental health problems including schizophrenia, bipolar, severe affective disorders and personality disorders.

Urban Growth started in December 2009 with Ecominds funding. Over time, the project established strong local partnerships with Camden Council, Camden Church of England Parish, Camden Garden Centre, Age Concern Camden and The Peoples Supermarket to provide opportunities for participants. Building positive relationships with local communities and improving the local environment helped to de-stigmatise mental health problems.

The project transformed a neglected Camden Council site in Elm Village into a productive organic food growing site and community garden. The site is now open to the public and project participants have daily contact with community visitors and volunteers.

The project improved a further two sites in partnership with the local church and a local charity.

Over 50 participants were involved in all aspects of developing and running the project, supported by two members of staff.

Hundreds of local people have visited the sites, many of whom have actively engaged with the project.

Project participants were thrilled to welcome The Prince of Wales to their garden in January 2012.

It’s given my life routine and structure and a bridge back to normal living. The skills I am gaining will be invaluable to me for the rest of my life. (Urban Growth participant)

It’s a fantastic development and an asset to the area. We used to have security issues here. The Urban Growth project has created an attractive and productive piece of land.

(St Michael’s Church volunteer)
Bankside Open Spaces Trust works with local people to develop parks and gardens in which they can kick a ball, grow plants and relax. The charity’s Waterloo Wildlife, Bankside Biodiversity project supported people with mental health problems in horticultural therapy and nature training sessions. Participants took part in a range of wildlife activities including gardening, nature training sessions and wildlife improvements.

It was good fun. It lifted my mood.
(Waterloo Wildlife, Bankside Biodiversity participant)
The Waterway Wellbeing project supports volunteers to undertake projects on and around London’s waterways. The charity runs gardening events, canal walks, clean-ups and creative projects, managing waterway vegetation and improving the local environment.

Involvement with Thames21 gives volunteers the chance to learn new skills, meet people and spend time enjoying the outdoors. Volunteers can choose to complete accredited training modules that build their capacity to run their own waterway clean-up events in London. They can get involved in as many events as they wish, with Thames21 providing support in a friendly and welcoming atmosphere.

Working on London’s rivers and canals has made me the happiest I have ever been. I have a fantastic quality of life, and I am calmer and more patient. I am now in a position to help others who are facing similar problems, and my ongoing voluntary work has led to a full-time job with Thames21. (Waterway Wellbeing Project Coordinator)

What next?
The project is now run by a former volunteer who holds a part-time post with Thames21.

Feedback from participants reveals that involvement with the project has increased people’s levels of confidence, easing their feelings of social isolation and reducing their reliance on mental health user groups.
Finchale Training College provides rehabilitation and training programmes for adults experiencing barriers to employment and independence. Starting out as a rehabilitation centre for injured servicemen in 1943, Finchale continues to provide support services for members of the armed forces who are in need. Finchale helps over 300 adults a year, from civilian and military communities, to access training and support to gain employment and move forward in life.

Ecominds funding enabled trainees from Finchale Training College to design, build, and install a garden for the Royal Horticultural Society’s annual flower show at Tatton Park, Cheshire.

The theme of the garden was recycling and conservation. Trainees constructed all elements of the garden from recycled materials and plants they had grown at the college. In 2009, the garden was reconstructed several times and was awarded a Royal Horticultural Society Silver Gilt Award at the Tatton Show and a gold medal at the Gateshead Summer Flower Show.

The project had a life-changing impact on the lives of the students involved, all of whom benefited from significant learning and work experience. It also had a significant effect on students’ mental health by increasing their self-esteem, and boosting their confidence and pride in their abilities. All students involved went on to gain employment in horticulture, in roles such as landscaping or gardening.

A Load of Old Rubbish was a life-changing project for our students... It offered them the chance to apply vocational skills, demonstrate their flair and abilities as horticulturists to a professional audience and – most of all – it gave them something to feel great about.

(Finchale College tutor)
In summer 2011, the Flotsam and Jetsam Challenge supported a group of people experiencing mental health problems to attain an environmental award (the John Muir Award) from the John Muir Trust. Through a series of challenges, the award encourages people of all backgrounds to learn more about wild places and how to care for them. Participants in the Flotsam and Jetsam Challenge completed the four required challenges along the coast of Northumberland. They took part in activities that were not usual for them, and discovered that engaging with the natural world has great potential for improving their physical and mental health. The group presented an exhibition of their experiences in Newcastle arts centre The Holy Biscuit in September 2011.

The project continued in 2012–13 with the Highways and Byways Tour – a programme using inner-city and rural artworks to teach navigation skills to adults experiencing mental health problems. Flotsam and Jetsam Challenge participants are also planning more sessions where they will create new art for a future public exhibition.

- Participants removed large amounts of plastic from local beaches.
- As part of the project, the group had to conserve a wild place. The group worked with the National Trust to clear an area of coastline of invasive plants.
- Participants produced artworks highlighting the affect of pollution and litter on the environment.
- Exhibitions raised public awareness of the dangers of marine pollution and brought the beauty of the Northumberland coastline to a wider audience with the aim of encouraging more people to conserve their local environment.
- The project presented a positive public image of people experiencing mental health problems.

**Being outside makes us feel relaxed – being in the middle of nowhere. I’m keen to go out more now.** (William Taylor, Flotsam and Jetsam Challenge participant)

**The award gave the group a focus. It provided them with confidence to talk about the environment and improve their communication skills. Members of the group have come on hugely since they began.** (Danny Gilchrist, Project Director, Mobex North East)

**Conserving nature, learning about the damage that the red hot pokers do because they’re an alien species – we had to hunt them down. We’ve been up close to nature and now I want to get more involved in protecting the environment.** (Craig Douglas, Flotsam and Jetsam Challenge participant)

**What next?**

The project continued in 2012–13 with the Highways and Byways Tour – a programme using inner-city and rural artworks to teach navigation skills to adults experiencing mental health problems. Flotsam and Jetsam Challenge participants are also planning more sessions where they will create new art for a future public exhibition.
Healthy Parks, Healthy Minds

Conceived and piloted by Groundwork North East, Healthy Parks, Healthy Minds enabled residents of South East Northumberland and Darlington with severe and enduring mental health problems to engage in supported environmental volunteer work, develop their skills, and improve their self-esteem.

Participants took part in practical conservation activities including learning about a variety of plants, pruning trees, improving community spaces, and planting wildflowers and bulbs. The project gave people an opportunity to ‘give something back’ to their community, leading to increased sense of pride, fitness, social interaction, confidence-building, and mental and physical wellbeing. Participants were referred by local mental health services, including day-care services, the Primary Care Trust and hospitals. The regular volunteering of Healthy Park, Healthy Minds created a positive weekly routine for participants, enabling them to develop new skills and to prepare some people for a return to paid work.

What next?
In June 2013, Groundwork secured funding from the Big Lottery Fund to run the project for two years and expand it to Northumberland and Darlington. Northumberland County Council has contributed funding towards the capital costs. Groundwork will also make an in-kind donation in the form of minibus use, tools and meeting room space.

Ecominds Supporting Change funding identified ways in which the project could be made self-sustaining in the long term. One plan to achieve this is to enable people to take part in the project using their NHS personal budgets. Another potential source of sustainable funding is to conduct green-space improvement works in business parks and on private land, aiming to secure contributions from the private sector. Funds generated would be channelled back into the project to directly benefit participants.

- During the pilot phase the group contributed to Newbiggin in Bloom (part of the Royal Horticultural Society’s Britain in Bloom campaign) helping to plant 15,000 wildflowers, 3,000 bulbs and 420 trees.
- 38 participants were supported during the pilot phase.

We have several clients who regularly attend the project and really benefit from the opportunities available. The project provides additional support to engage them and encourage them to develop their conservation skills and increase their confidence... The project has adapted and is continuing to develop, and I will continue to support the project to work with our clients. (Lynsey Martin, Senior Occupational Therapist, Adult Mental Health Day Services, Ashmore House)

I recently referred a gentleman to the project who has experienced a severe depressive episode. With the support of the Groundwork team he now attends two sessions every week. He reports that the group sessions give him the opportunity to engage in productive activity, and provide him with a sense of purpose and access to peer support. I feel, as do other members of the wider team who work with him, that he greatly benefits from being involved with the project. (Helen Watchorn, Occupational Therapist, St Georges Park)
Villa Real is a mixed day school for pupils who have severe and complex learning difficulties, some of whom also have autistic spectrum disorder or cerebral palsy. Their Muddy Wellies project provided ecotherapy for young people aged 2 to 25 with severe learning difficulties. Some participants also had physical difficulties, sensory or communication impairments, and severe challenging behaviours.

The project enabled participants to connect with nature to enhance their wellbeing by becoming carers themselves – of a plant or an animal. Activities were varied and included horse-riding, stable management, farm work experience and many more. The project organised camping holidays in the Lake District, which included canoeing, climbing, gorge-walking and coasteering.

Villa Real School continues to run a summer holiday Eco Arts Club with the help of an artist in residence.

---

**Muddy Wellies**

Facilitated green exercise

Lead organisation: Villa Real School

Consett, County Durham

villareal.durham.sch.uk

The children love coming here. It’s wonderful to see how much they interact with the animals.

(Linda, Highland Cattle Centre owner)

We’re having a fantastic time. It’s great.

(Tom, Muddy Wellies participant)
Out and About

Facilitated green exercise
Lead organisation: Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind
Middlesbrough and Stockton, North Yorkshire
01642 645 655
middlesbroughandstocktonmind.org.uk

Ecominds funding enabled Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind to work with Middlesbrough Environment City to develop the Out and About project, to engage people with mental health problems in environmentally sustainable activities.

Participants contributed to allotment and food growing schemes, nature conservation, creation of natural play areas and promotion of sustainable transport such as walking and cycling. The activities promoted awareness of environmental issues among participants and local communities, as well as increased understanding of mental health issues, contributing to social inclusion and community cohesion.

The project’s support and development officer supported participants and worked with other environmental organisations to help them to involve more people with mental health problems, and their families, in the activities.

I like being outside and talking to the other people on the project. It gives me a reason to get up in the mornings. (Jon, Out and About participant)

I didn’t think I would like the walk because I get really nervous when I’m outside, but I felt safe. Talking with Jim (the support worker) and the other walkers took my mind off worrying. After the walk, my husband and I decided to walk home rather than get a taxi. (Debra, Out and About participant)

What next?
Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind’s ecotherapy work has continued through their new social and therapeutic horticulture programme, Gardens in Mind. The programme provides a series of therapist-led workshops and activities to improve people’s mental and physical wellbeing and to help them gain confidence and new skills. Ecominds Supporting Change funding identified ways in which the project could be made self-sustaining in the long term. One plan to achieve this is to enable people to take part in the project using their NHS personal budgets. Another potential source of sustainable funding is to conduct green-space improvement works in business parks and on private land, aiming to secure contributions from the private sector. Funds generated would be channelled back into the project to directly benefit participants.
Branch Out gave people with mental health problems an opportunity to take part in a wide range of ecotherapy activities across East Lancashire, supporting them on their road to recovery.

Participants engaged in:
- horticulture – sowing, planting and creating growing spaces
- woodland skills training – coppicing, fencing, nature conservation and tree planting at a range of sites
- dry stone walling
- farm visits (learning about livestock)
- green woodworking and rustic furniture making (learning about tools and techniques)
- eco-art (developing drawing and painting skills by creating nature-based artwork)
- willow-weaving
- wool art (designing and creating products using hand-dyed wool and traditional techniques)
- digital wildlife photography
- local food growing (learning about mushroom growing, foraging for wild food and cooking seasonal fruit and vegetables).

Branch Out has been very valuable for me and my depression – it has been beneficial to my recovery. (Branch Out participant)

I’ve been able to make some new friends... and feel useful. I’m going to continue as a volunteer after my sessions have finished. (Branch Out participant)

Of the 272 participants who took part in Branch Out (to December 2011):
- 156 people completed the 12-session ecotherapy programme
- 65 continued to volunteer with local organisations.
Netherton Feelgood Factory is a community centre that runs a wide range of projects to promote health and wellbeing. Funded by Ecominds, the centre’s Community Gardeners project supported volunteers with mental health problems to learn new skills by contributing to a local gardening service. Participants worked in the community allotment and undertook gardening work for older people living in their own homes.

Community Gardeners improved participants’ mental and physical wellbeing by enhancing their self-confidence and encouraging them to interact. The project also helped to reduce stigma associated with mental health problems by enabling local people to see participants integrating with the community in activities that improved the lives of others.

I feel as though my confidence has grown since I started here, not only in gardening, but in my communication skills as well. The people whose gardens we’ve worked on have been very happy and grateful for what we have done, and I find that very rewarding. The project was extremely beneficial for my mood and mental health in general.

(Community Gardeners participant)
Community & Business Partners CIC (CBP) is a not-for-profit organisation supporting businesses, community groups and voluntary bodies with a range of advisory and practical services. Its Crafting Confidence programme offers therapeutic sessions to adults with mental health problems. Participants use waste materials to create art and craft objects.

The programme takes place in The Energy Zone – a refurbished community centre in the heart of one of Blackburn with Darwen Borough’s most disadvantaged areas. It provides a supportive environment for participants to build confidence, cultivate new interests and develop friendships. The project collaborates with other mental wellbeing partners to ensure access to the people who will benefit most from the opportunity.

Evidence gathered during the course of the project indicates that it provided essential support to some of the community’s most vulnerable people. The closure of local day centres has had a significant impact on people with mental health problems, leading to their further isolation and an increased demand for art therapy.

Ecominds funding enabled CBP to employ sessional tutors to design and deliver classes in a range of practical, sedentary art and craft activities, catering to a variety of cultural backgrounds and targeting hard-to-reach females.

Engaging in art is a positive way to express thoughts and feelings and has proved to be very therapeutic for participants, helping them to make new friends and lead more fulfilling lives. The project team has received feedback from residents, healthcare professionals and referral partners in Blackburn with Darwen Borough via evaluation forms, questionnaires, case studies and one-to-one meetings. The feedback reveals that the classes have been extremely effective in reducing isolation and breaking down the barriers that are often experienced by people with mental health problems.

I really enjoyed making my bowl. The tutors are friendly and help me to feel confident and I like working with the rest of the group. I have made new friends during my classes and learnt new skills. I would like to do this forever.

(Crafting Confidence participant)

What next?

CBP plans to continue the project by sourcing small amounts of funding to support its running costs. They have carried out a lot of work investigating ways of addressing the government’s personalisation agenda of putting people first to improve social care.
Garden Needs

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Mind in Salford
Higher Broughton, Greater Manchester
01617 925 448
info@gardenneeds.org.uk
mindinsalford.org.uk

Garden Needs is a community wellbeing garden centre with a mental health focus in Higher Broughton, Salford, bordering Kersal Dale Nature Reserve. The project is a partnership between Mind in Salford and Social Adventures, and works with a wide range of local people, with a particular focus on those with experience of emotional or mental health problems. The project runs vocational rehabilitation twice a week and a range of four-week training programmes, volunteering opportunities and placements.

Garden Needs hosts regular community events including workshops, training sessions and social activities, giving local people the opportunity to meet and learn new skills in a beautiful outdoor setting.

I was a recluse for 10 years and I felt completely isolated. Garden Needs helped me make my first steps back into the world again. It was scary, but knowing that other volunteers are here for a similar reason gave me confidence.
I know that people here have empathy and understanding of what I’m going through. (Garden Needs participant)

What next?
Garden Needs plans to increase the number of people benefiting from the centre, connecting more people to nature and inspiring them to live healthier and happier lives. To achieve this, the project is developing a seven-day programme of vocational rehabilitation. The project will connect with local employers and occupational health providers to offer early interventions and a mindfulness training programme that will aim to achieve speedier and long-lasting recoveries. Garden Needs will also deliver a three-day programme for young adults with learning disabilities, and weekend activities and courses for the whole community.

The long-term plan is to develop the Garden Needs site to include a small café, eco-buildings, wildlife and sensory areas, and a small camping area.

Garden Needs has given me the confidence to accept my condition in the outside world and start to tell people outside of Garden Needs about it. I’m now getting more support from neighbours and other people. I feel normal, there are others like me. (Garden Needs participant)
Growing On

Social and therapeutic horticulture

Lead organisation: The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) Merseyside

Cranton, Widnes, Merseyside

0151 423 433
tcv.org.uk

TCV Merseyside's Growing On project supports people with experience of mental health problems to work with volunteers to help break down stigma and barriers associated with mental health. The project is based in the walled garden at Clarke Gardens, Liverpool, an area previously left to ruin before BTCV Merseyside took it over in 2008.

Participants have transformed the once-derelict piece of land into a usable, viable tree nursery that draws many local people. They have taken part in activities including constructing raised beds, caring for saplings and fruit trees, lifting and grading bare root trees, constructing footpaths, caring for soil, collecting tree seeds and growing trees.

Participants have been pivotal in directing the course of the project, being involved in key decision-making, organising work groups and leading mini-projects. For example, one participant is in charge of the tools maintenance side of the project, fixing broken spades and garden forks, as well as other tools and objects around the site.

What next?
Growing On sessions run every week and all volunteers have the opportunity to complete accredited courses as part of the project.

- 44 people have volunteered with the project since it began.
- Over one-third of participants have progressed to education, employment or further volunteering.
- Two participants have returned to university.
- Five participants have become volunteer officers with TCV.
- Many participants now attend doctors' surgeries or walk-in centres less frequently than they did before they were involved with Growing On.
Growing Well

Care farming

Lead organisation: Growing Well

Low Sizergh, Kendal

01539 561 777

info@growingwell.co.uk

growingwell.co.uk

What next?

Growing Well has been able to negotiate financial support from the local NHS Clinical Commissioning Group and from the Northern Rock Foundation to pilot a therapeutic community for people experiencing personality disorders. This will run one day per week. On other days, participants will have access to Growing Well’s other activities and support opportunities.

Growing Well plans to continue the project beyond 2014 as part of its social prescribing work.

Between 2009 and 2012, one-third of the 130 Growing Well volunteers had moved on to employment, education, or further volunteering. An independent impact evaluation conducted by the Brathay Trust Research Hub is available to download from the Growing Well website.

Ecominds funding has enabled Growing Well to develop a programme of support and vocational training for people recovering from mental health problems. With Ecominds funding, Growing Well has developed two pilot projects: one engages NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) young adults in volunteering activities, and the other seeks to prove the value of ‘social prescribing’ – where GPs prescribe a social intervention to improve a person’s mental wellbeing.

Volunteers value Growing Well as a unique experience and distinguish this from other forms of mental health support.

(Extract from evaluation report)

Named 2010 British Rural Enterprise of the Year, Growing Well organically farms six acres of Low Sizergh Farm, running a crop share scheme that supplies 100 local families weekly with seasonal vegetables. Growing Well is a City & Guilds centre, training participants and local people in horticulture at levels one, two and three. They also run a programme of school workshops and farm visits, teaching children about food growing and how to stay mentally and physically well. The organisation is dedicated to cooperative working, encouraging participants to take on a range of responsibilities within the organisation, including membership of the board of directors.
Grozone Community Garden

Social and therapeutic horticulture

Lead organisation: Groundwork Cheshire

Northwich, Cheshire

01606 723 160
groundworkaction.org.uk/grozone

Grozone is a community garden project in Northwich run as a partnership between Groundwork Cheshire, Cheshire West, Chester Council and other organisations. The garden has transformed a derelict site into a supportive and welcoming green oasis for local people. Visitors can meet, relax, and take part in activities benefitting their health and wellbeing such as food growing, outdoor exercise, environmental education sessions and volunteering.

Ecominds funded Grozone's Connect and Be Active volunteering sessions, where 22 people with experience of mental health problems worked as volunteers alongside 81 volunteers from the local community, learning skills such as constructing paths and growing plants.

While Grozone is clearly having an environmental impact on the land, it is also nurturing and growing the community... Staying healthy and independent is not simply about access to healthcare services. It is equally important for people to have easy access to opportunities that actively promote holistic physical and mental wellbeing.

Grozone is a real resource for people in Northwich to achieve this outcome.

(Public Health Improvement Lead, Western Cheshire Primary Care Trust)

I've been visiting the project to introduce new participants and have been very impressed – not only by the friendly atmosphere, but also the variety of work going on. The staff have a lovely, understanding attitude, helping new members to feel welcome and at ease. Careful thought is given to match daily jobs to the abilities and interests of the individual members.

(Member of the Primary Care Mental Health Social Care Team)
Kitchen Garden is a productive, inclusive and welcoming allotment project supporting people through therapeutic horticulture and related physical exercise, with the aim of improving their wellbeing. Tameside, Oldham and Glossop Mind runs four allotment sites across Tameside, each with a different focus.

Open to anyone living in Tameside, Oldham and Glossop over the age of 16 who can self-refer, the project also provides sessions for adults with additional needs. Participants help to maintain the allotment site and can choose to take part through structured taster courses on seed-sowing, transplanting and pruning, or attending drop-in sessions to assist in general allotment tasks.

Kitchen Garden is a productive unit, providing fresh vegetables and fruit for Tameside, Oldham & Glossop Mind’s three Topaz cafés.

I’m really glad I came up here today. I find it hard to get out of the house, but I always feel better if I do come down. Coming up here and talking to everyone... you see there’s loads of good people out there.

This is my therapy – it has sorted me right out. (Kitchen Garden participants)

What next?
The project team plans to continue providing drop-in sessions, workshops and courses to help people improve their wellbeing outdoors. The number of project participants with NHS personal budgets attending supported sessions continues to increase. The Kitchen Garden now offers accredited QCF horticultural courses and is building relationships with schools and younger people. The project’s latest allotment site in Hyde Park, Tameside, provides a new opportunity to increase public awareness and host more Kitchen Garden activities.
Developed by Mind in Mid Herts, the Natural Recovery project encouraged members of the community to engage with nature to improve their wellbeing. Based at Syrian House (a residential care home for adults with enduring mental health problems) the group started growing organic vegetables in January 2010.

Ecominds funding enabled the group to transform an area of lawn into an art-based sensory garden used by residents, visitors, and members of the local community. The garden now features an organic vegetable plot, colourful and edible flowers, soft plants, aromatic herbs and eco-friendly pieces of art created by participants at Natural Recovery’s art workshops. The project promoted sustainability, demonstrating the benefits of growing your own organic food and conserving nature by supporting garden wildlife. The project helped to develop participants’ life skills, contributing to their independence and recovery.

Natural Recovery also ran a programme of gardening sessions and art workshops open to anyone in the community. The project brought together residents and volunteers to reduce social exclusion and combating stigma relating to mental health.

This is my first time working in mental health and I must say it really changed my mind about how to relate to people who experience mental health problems. I believe working in the garden improves the physical and mental health of everyone involved. (Cristian, Natural Recovery volunteer)

We have a close-knit team of volunteers who are dedicated to promoting sustainability, social inclusion and helping the residents of Syrian House in their recovery. I have enjoyed every second of the project, learning something new every day, and meeting many new friends. (Carolina, Natural Recovery project coordinator)
Planting Positive Futures is a therapeutic gardening project – a collaboration between Carlisle and Eden Mind and the NHS Foundation Trust based in Cumbria’s main inpatient setting, the Carleton Clinic.

Short- and long-stay inpatients take part in therapeutic horticulture activities in courtyard gardens, vegetable plots and a green sanctuary used by patients, staff and visitors. Participants work to maintain the gardens and grow food then used in the occupational therapy kitchen. Some people use the spaces simply to enjoy some peace and quiet away from the ward environment. The project also engages people who may not have leave off the ward, or who may require additional support to participate.

The project is slowly expanding into new areas of the hospital, with participants now maintaining the flower display in the main reception and pruning shrubbery around the site. Participants have been involved at every stage of planning, choosing what plants and vegetables they grow and what work they do. When income is raised from selling plants, participants are consulted for ideas on how the funds should be spent.

Planting Positive Futures brings patients together with community groups to help combat stigma associated with mental health problems and to promote social inclusion. More than 20 participants have enjoyed field trips to the Low Luckens Resource Centre, visits to local garden centres and volunteering activities with Cumbria Wildlife Trust and Botcherby Healthy Living Scheme’s allotment.

**What next?**

The NHS Foundation Trust has provided £8,800 to enable the project coordinator to continue working four days a week until early 2014. Gardening activities on the Hadrian Ward will be increased for patients that do not have ‘leave’ from the ward. A new 16-bed rehabilitation unit for men will open in December 2013, and it is planned that patients from there will work on the unit, in the main courtyard garden and in the community.

---

**I enjoyed lopping hedges. It was nice getting away from the hospital and into the countryside. It was tiring, but I felt that I had done something useful, it was like having a job again for a short time.**

(Planting Positive Futures participant)

- One hundred per cent of patients participating on the project felt better after spending time in the garden.
- Over the course of the project more and more patients visited the garden unescorted to have a chat, play chess or join in with some work. This increased freedom and choice of how to spend their time empowered them and prepared them for discharge.
- Two previous participants in the project have successfully gained employment.
- The experience of working in the garden doing practical tasks and supporting patients gave one young man the confidence to gain employment in a local park.
- In June 2013, ITV Border News and Radio Cumbria visited the garden and interviewed staff and patients during the garden’s open week. It was broadcast on television and radio with many people commenting positively on the project.
- The project has worked successfully with a number of patients whom ward staff had previously found difficult to engage. These patients appear to feel more relaxed in the garden and view the project coordinator as ‘neutral’ – a gardener, rather than a member of staff.
Abbey Physic Community Garden is a walled garden set on half an acre of land in the heart of Faversham. It’s run as a community-based charity that works to promote the therapeutic benefits of horticultural activities. The garden is a place where people who are experiencing mental health problems – and people who are socially and economically disadvantaged – can enhance their physical and mental wellbeing and strengthen their confidence and self-esteem.

The project supports people to re-integrate into the wider community with a view to their returning to work or education. The garden is a Permaculture Land Learning Centre and a registered ASDAN Centre, delivering CVQ qualifications in volunteering at Levels 1 to 3.

Ecominds funding enabled the charity to reach out to more people experiencing mental health problems and encourage them to take part in ecotherapy activities at the garden.

It’s important to undergo psychological treatments for schizophrenia as well as taking drugs... I regard the garden as an alternative form of therapy that provides support and encouragement.

(Abbey Physic Community Garden participant)
Blooming Marvellous

Social and therapeutic horticulture

Lead organisation: Rushmoor Voluntary Services

Rushmoor, Hampshire

01252 540 162

rvs.org.uk | bloomingmarvellousrushmoor.blogspot.co.uk

Blooming Marvellous is a supported volunteer gardening project working to enhance the gardens and green spaces of Rushmoor, Hampshire. The project empowers people who want to get involved in volunteering but need support to do so.

Participants have the opportunity to improve their mental and physical wellbeing by helping local residents and organisations manage and enhance the local environment. Participants have taken part in a range of activities including converting a field at St Michael’s Abbey, Farnborough, into public allotments; and constructing a BMX track at Herons Wey Girlguiding campsite on the banks of the River Wey in Tilford, Surrey.

What next?
The project team is currently seeking alternative funding sources to ensure that Blooming Marvellous can continue to engage people experiencing mental health problems in ecotherapy activities as part of their path to recovery.

I like having something to do... rather than sitting around getting depressed. The bonus is that we help people in need. (Kate, Blooming Marvellous participant)

The project has challenged the stigma associated with mental health problems and increased participants’ wellbeing by empowering them to make a positive contribution to their local communities.
Earthwise

Facilitated green exercise

Lead organisation: Circle of Life Rediscovery

Ringmer, East Sussex

01273 814 226

info@circleofliferediscovery.com

circleofliferediscovery.com | theoutdoorteacher.wordpress.com

I want to share with you what these woodland projects mean to me. The overriding feeling that I get when being in the woods is ‘freedom’. I’m sure I’m not the only person who feels this way. It’s getting a chance to be who you really are, be it random and loud or shy and quiet. The woodland brings out the absolute best in people – that’s what I love the most.

(Earthwise participant)

- 232 young people engaged with the project.
- 72 Child and Adolescence Mental Health Services staff attended at least one project session.
- 59 Circle of Life Rediscovery staff attended at least one project session.
- The project launched a film Call of the Wild which can be watched on Circle of Life Rediscovery’s YouTube channel.

Circle of Life Rediscovery run a range of environmental programmes including: Forest School Plus, woodland days, camps and training programmes for young people and adults. The company’s Earthwise project brings together young people who have experienced mental health problems, families, and Child and Adolescence Mental Health Services (CAMHS) staff to create and participate in outdoor-based youth leadership and woodland activities.

The project offers opportunities for teenagers to gain OCN accreditation in Basic Woodland Skills and Knowledge, and volunteer to support younger people and their families. Circle of Life Rediscovery provides a welcoming space where participants feel confident to fully participate, and to know they have an opinion that is valued and a right to vocalise their needs.

What next?

Circle of Life Rediscovery plans to extend its outdoor experiences for young people affected by mental health problems and their families, helping them to discover a sense of freedom and place to increase their wellbeing. The company will continue to join with partner organisations, and people from all walks of life, to raise awareness of the benefits of ecotherapy.
Eco for Life Mentoring (ELM)

Hampton Trust is a charity working with local communities throughout Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Gloucestershire, Devon and The Channel Islands. The charity works to offer inclusive and relevant services to people affected by violence, abuse and social isolation.

In March 2009, Ecominds funding enabled the Hampton Trust to lease land on the Isle of Wight to provide ecologically focused workshops for young people experiencing mental health problems and social isolation.

Young participants are supported by trained volunteer mentors at a range of workshops. They have the opportunity to become Hampton Trust ‘Eco Warriors’ and take part in events that raise awareness of ecological and mental health issues and land space transformation within the community. Participants have benefited from increased mental wellbeing and resilience gained through practical training in social skills, group work, ecology and community involvement.

When I talk to my mentor it helps me to understand things and feel better – less sad and less angry.
(ELM participant)

What next?
Hampton Trust has obtained partial funding from current referring organisations to continue the ELM project from May 2013, and is developing an ELM project toolkit for participants. The charity is currently delivering two training programmes to young people: the John Muir Award in ecology and an ASDAN environmental award.

The trust has gained funding from Isle of Wight Council’s Public Health Department for an adult mental health 12-week Eco mentoring programme, brought about as a direct result of the success of the Ecominds-funded work. The trust has been successful in gaining funding for its equine therapy workshops from the William Wates Foundation funded until April 2016.

Hampton Trust will continue to host seasonal community events and, from April 2015, will run ecotherapy workshops for businesses.
Grow, now an independent community group, emerged from the Ecominds-funded project run by Mind in Brighton and Hove. The project was set up to support people with a range of mental health problems to increase their wellbeing by spending time in nature as part of a safe and supportive group.

Weekly groups meet over an eight-week period with participants travelling together by minibus into the Sussex countryside. Activities are flexible enough to suit different levels of energy, ability and mood, and participants choose what they would like to do on any given day. Participants can choose to take part in guided nature walks, conservation activities, green woodworking, environmental art, mindfulness, relaxation exercises, healthy lunches and fireside tea and chat sessions.

Grow groups offer a sense of community and belonging, welcoming every person’s unique experiences and interests. The project offers an intake for new participants every three months.

What next?
Grow now operates in partnership with Mind in Brighton and Hove, and the National Trust. It is set to expand its service from October 2013 to offer weekly closed group days for eight sessions at Saddlescombe Farm, a weekly drop-in day at Stanmer Organics, and occasional monthly special activities.

I’ve always felt much better, hopeful, energised, and more able to face the world, after being out with Grow. (Grow participant)

I’m less isolated, more optimistic, and more connected to others. It’s been so refreshing to learn how to focus on the beauty of the environment rather than on being unwell. (Grow participant)

Grow has transformed many participants’ lives, significantly increasing their resilience and overall wellbeing. They have gained confidence, self-esteem, hope and a sense of belonging. The project encourages peer support and helps participants make links with other organisations. Many participants have moved on to volunteer roles, either with Grow, or with other eco-projects or community groups.
Grow 2 Grow

Care farming

Lead organisation: WWOOF UK (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms)

Edenbridge, Kent

01732 463 255

wwoo.org.uk

Grow 2 Grow is a membership charity that teaches people about organic growing and low-impact lifestyles through hands-on experience. Grow 2 Grow providers therapeutically supported placements for vulnerable young people aged between 14 and 24 years at Commonwork, an organic dairy farm in Kent.

Young people work with WWOOF UK to grow organic fruit and vegetables. Some of the produce provides meals at Commonwork education sessions and public events, and some is sold to local shops, restaurants and pubs. Young people can also choose to work with the dairy herd to learn milking and herd management.

Weekly one-to-one therapeutic sessions address obstacles and barriers, and acknowledge participants’ achievements. WWOOF works to support participants’ family members, schools, colleges, social workers and other members of their networks, and provides mental health training for professionals working with young people.

The Grow 2 Grow team includes two clinical psychologists, an occupational therapist and a horticultural therapist (all part-time) and a full-time gardener.

What next?

WWOOF UK plans to increase the number of Grow 2 Grow project placements, develop the project’s social enterprise market garden, and expand its mental health training programme for professionals working with young people. Following feedback from young people leaving Grow 2 Grow, the project team has set up a low-fee community counselling service which includes vocational support so that young people have some continued support after they leave the project. In April 2014, the team will launch the UK’s first green care and mental health training programme.

I feel peaceful as soon as I arrive here – it’s the only place in my life which isn’t noisy.

(Grow 2 Grow participant)

- 46 young people took part in the project.
- Of these, nearly 75% have had sustained engagement in the project, attending one or two days per week for up to two years.
- Over 80% of young participants have made progress into either education, or voluntary or paid employment.
- Evaluation indicates that all participants are experiencing improved mental health and wellbeing.
Growing 4 Life

Social and therapeutic horticulture

Lead organisation: Thrive

Berkshire, Hampshire and South Oxfordshire

01189 885 688

thrive.org.uk

Thrive works to change the lives of disabled people through gardening. The charity helps people who want to garden at home, on an allotment or in a community setting, and runs structured horticultural therapy programmes in the South East.

Thrive’s Growing 4 Life project uses therapeutic horticulture to create community gardening projects for older people with mental health problems, particularly encouraging participation by people aged over 55. The project works with participants to improve mental and physical health, reduce isolation, build confidence, improve self-esteem, increase motivation and create new social networks. Participants learn horticultural skills by taking part in activities to improve allotments, parks, woodlands, and other public green spaces across Berkshire, Hampshire and South Oxfordshire.

Growing 4 Life focuses on social interaction and creates self-supporting groups that can continue to meet after the six-month project period. Each group meets once a week for a three-hour activity session, and is supervised and supported by a Thrive project officer. From the projects completed in the first year, two self-supporting groups continue to meet in Hampshire and Berkshire.

The park visitors appreciate our work and I like to think that I have become a part of it. My gardening knowledge has widened and I know I can learn much more. My fellow gardeners are a fun bunch and we laugh a lot.

(Growing 4 Life participant, Dinton Pastures Country Park, Wokingham)

- In its first year, Growing 4 Life supported over 30 participants and helped to improve five local community green spaces.
- To date, 45 participants have taken part in Growing 4 Life in six locations.
- The project has created a practical guide to setting up a gardening project for people with mental health problems.
Growing Better Lives

Social and therapeutic horticulture

Lead organisation: Growing Better Lives CIC (formerly Exclusion Link)

Slough, Berkshire

078 6859 6115 | 079 0549 1970

fionalomasnpd@gmail.com | rexhaigh@nhs.net (for NHS referral)

personalitydisorder.org.uk

Complex emotional needs (often diagnosed as ‘personality disorders’) are an under-recognised and historically poorly treated group of debilitating conditions. People experiencing these needs often respond well to a voluntary sector cultural approach as an alternative to traditional NHS services. Growing Better Lives gives people the opportunity to benefit from group work in nature settings. Participants can take part in the project either in preparation for, in addition to, instead of, or as rehabilitation after NHS programmes.

Growing Better Lives is run in two settings: with young carers in Pangbourne (with Frontiers – Adventures in Learning) and with socially excluded adults who have a diagnosis of personality disorder or emotional complex needs in Slough (with Iver Environment Centre and Groundwork). The project offers participants access to a therapeutic yurt, and a choice of activities ranging from cooking to pond cleaning.

Growing Better Lives CIC is developing a Centre for Alternative Mental Health to promote ecotherapy, greencare, education, training and research. Ecominds funding opened up lines of communication with many greencare programmes across England with whom the CIC is now jointly promoting the therapeutic benefits of ecotherapy and green care.

In July 2013 Growing Better Lives CIC co-hosted the first national greencare conference, Growing Towards Recovery, which the organisation hopes will become a bi-annual event. The CIC is expanding its service, facilitating more groups and offering voluntary and paid employment to graduates of the original Growing Better Lives programme.

I felt much better after I went. I got home and felt a bit better. It started to make sense. (Growing Better Lives participant)

The project has brought growth, water, plants, colour and vibrancy to a previously barren hospital-based therapeutic setting. People often tell us about the positive impact our project has had on their lives. (Growing Better Lives project team member)
The Home Grown Community Garden is a gardening group for people with mental health problems that was set up with Ecominds funding. The project is based at The Bridge, a community centre with its own fruit and vegetable garden. Participants play an integral part in the maintenance and development of the centre, as well as being involved in a vegetable bag scheme.

The Bridge offers opportunities for those looking to widen their experience and work in an environment close to a real job situation. People with no outdoor space and no gardening experience have been able to learn about the benefits of growing their own fruit and vegetables organically.

Of the 55 people who engaged with the project, 30% went on to further volunteering, education or employment.

The project has engaged people from a range of age groups – from under 16s to over 65s. While the majority of participants are experiencing mental health problems, almost half are also physically disabled.

The project has started a discussion about mental health with project participants and other users of the centre, working to overcome stigma associated with mental health problems. Through gentle education with all centre users about mental health issues, the project team has worked to ensure that the Home Grown Community Garden is an integrated activity within the centre.
Let’s Grow

Nature art and craft

Lead organisation: Folkestone and District Mind

Folkestone, Kent

01303 250 090
folkestonemind.org.uk

Folkestone and District Mind developed the Let’s Grow project at Romney Marsh Visitor Centre in partnership with Kent Wildlife Trust. People experiencing mental health problems participate in horticultural activities, pottery, painting and a wide range of craft work. Let’s Grow has now extended to another two rural venues and includes some activities provided by The Green Room at Elham.

The project brings people from various backgrounds together and the group works well as a team. Participants are given the opportunity to enrol as volunteers with Romney Marsh Visitor Centre and enjoy participation in the community garden throughout the week. Both rural Let’s Grow venues are accessible by bus, and travelling by bus has increased participants’ confidence in using public transport. Many members have acquired bus passes through their participation in this project, which has encouraged them to become more involved in their local community.

What next?

The project has successfully secured a three-year Reaching Communities grant from the Big Lottery Fund for its wellbeing programme. Let’s Grow will benefit from this funding, with activities continuing until at least October 2015.

Folkestone and District Mind has developed a Creative Minds group which creates arts and crafts materials that can be sold in Mind charity shops to raise funds. A local fencing company donates wood off-cuts as material for creative sessions, helping to reduce costs. The Creative Minds group is also exploring printing and selling cards, calendars and illustrated notebooks featuring members’ artwork as a fundraising opportunity.

Creative Minds continues to grow as it builds its network of community contacts. Members’ work has been shown in a local community exhibition of art and craft work with a further exhibition of pottery at Folkestone and District Mind’s AGM.

This is better than any medication. I can’t remember the last time I felt so alive.

(Let’s Grow participant)
Minding the Garden offers people who have experience of mental health problems or learning difficulties the opportunity to be part of a volunteer team offering a much-valued and competitively priced gardening service. With access to one-to-one support, participants are introduced to volunteering as part of a safe, friendly team. The project is a valuable first step towards volunteering in the community, actively encouraging participants to progress into mainstream volunteering, further education or paid work.

Minding the Garden is very visible in the local area. The team organises horticultural workshops for people experiencing long-term mental health problems or physical limitations, and provides weekly ecotherapy sessions for patients at the local Vista Healthcare hospital. The project also provides table-top horticultural therapy at local residential care homes.

What next?

Minding the Garden will continue to offer ecotherapy and garden maintenance opportunities for people with mental health problems or learning difficulties. Participants can choose to volunteer for half a day or a whole day a week, working in a variety of gardens including those belonging to elderly or disabled people. The project is currently sourcing additional funding to help subsidise the gardening service for vulnerable home-owners.

Hart Voluntary Action runs another project called Grow with Hart which promotes vegetable-growing garden-share schemes. This project will merge with Minding the Garden in 2014.

Minding the Garden is planning more sessions to take place in local gardens and allotment sites. The project is also expanding the number of table-top gardening activities it carries out in residential care homes.

Statistics gathered up to April 2013 reveal that:
- 125 volunteers have actively taken part in gardening activity over a period of four years
- 19% of Minding the Garden participants have moved into new employment or returned to work
- 21% have taken on mainstream volunteering roles
- 9% have taken up educational courses
- over 250 local gardens and community sites have received value-for-money gardening services.

I benefited more from the experience of working on the project than any other treatment I had received. There can be long waiting lists for talking therapies, which can be frustrating with no guarantee of a positive outcome. I really like the combination of working outdoors and helping other people and found ecotherapy to be an effective alternative to antidepressant medication, which didn’t really work for me.

(Minding the Garden participant)
Parks and Minds (now called Garden Minders) is a community gardening project run by Worthing and Arun Mind with support from Worthing Borough Council and local residents. The project overhauled, and now maintains, a previously neglected public garden and seafront area called Denton Gardens. This flourishing area of Worthing is at the heart of major seafront developments including a new swimming pool and Splash Point. The project provides on-the-job training for participants.

**What next?**

Positive feedback from the public has led to a commercial contract with Adur & Worthing Councils for £10,700 a year to work on various seafront locations. The contract will require Worthing and Arun Mind to recruit a motivated team of workers and volunteers with horticulture skills, and will ensure the continuation of the project.

- The project has devised a self-evaluation tool which all participants completed after their first six months on the project.
- Self-evaluation results show that ecotherapy has a positive impact on participants’ mental and physical health and wellbeing.
- At least 75% of people felt their mental and physical health had improved as a result of participating in the project.

I was relieved to find Parks and Minds because it offered practical, physical work which I enjoy. I work every Monday in Denton Gardens and Steyne Gardens. The role is varied – I could be doing anything from lawn-mowing, weeding, pruning, dead-heading flowers on Worthing seafront to clearing leaves.

The staff are very considerate and supportive and aware of the difficulties I face. I enjoy working alongside others who have had similar experiences. Earning money again makes me feel better – I am not relying on benefits.

Working for Parks and Minds has helped me a lot with my mental and physical wellbeing. Keeping active and doing something helps me to manage my schizophrenia. I cycle to the job every day which enables me to get more exercise. Doing gardening helps me to cope and manage; it makes a real difference.

I think you could not ask for a better activity than gardening. It is very therapeutic – you get fresh air, you get to feel a part of something. You see all the seasons come and go and watch plants and flowers come out.

(Parks and Minds participant)
Oxfordshire mental health charity Restore developed two community gardens in East Oxford and Didcot. The garden projects were led by two teams of volunteers with experience of mental health problems. The project has encouraged community interaction and helped to challenge stigmas associated with mental ill-health.

The project supported members in their recovery, encouraging them to develop skills and confidence and improving their mental and physical wellbeing.

Both gardens are located within mental health recovery facilities, and the project aimed to de-mystify mental illness. The project team held six community events, attended by approximately 2,500 people, that challenged discrimination associated with mental illness and promoted stronger, more inclusive local communities.

- The project supported 93 people with experience of mental health problems in their path to recovery.
- 35 additional volunteers were recruited to the project – almost three times the original expectation.
Bridewell Organic Gardens is an award-winning charity, based in a walled garden and five-acre vineyard. The project works to improve the emotional wellbeing of adults experiencing a range of mental health problems.

The Rural Crafts project enables participants to develop skills and self-confidence, providing pathways to voluntary work with mainstream environmental programmes and future employment opportunities. Participants enjoy a variety of indoor and outdoor activities including coppicing, hedge-laying, pole lathe-turning, hurdle-making and charcoal-making. Participants of all abilities have the opportunity to learn and develop new skills.

Over the two-year period of Ecominds funding:
- 50 people engaged with the project
- 10 participants have returned to work.

Feedback received from participants revealed that doing voluntary work:
- is an excellent way for people who have become very isolated to re-engage with their communities
- can help people regain confidence and experience to help them into employment.

It has been a pleasure to come to this oasis of peace, calm and safety over the past two years. It is with a mixture of sadness and excitement that I now move on.

(Rural Crafts participant)

What next?
Bridewell Organic Gardens will continue to work with people experiencing mental health problems, encouraging them to engage in mainstream voluntary work in the community as part of their recovery process.
The Orchard Shed project

Environmental conservation

Lead organisation: The John Townsend Trust

Margate, Kent
01843 227 561
enquiries@royalschoolfordeaf.kent.sch.uk
westgate-college.org.uk/orchard-garden/orchard-project
Facebook /pages/The-John-Townsend-Trust/355956011083997

The John Townsend Trust works with children and young people who are deaf or have communication impairments to prepare them for a positive future. The trust provides education, care, therapy, medical support, independence training and residential care.

The Orchard Shed project is based within the grounds of Westgate College, in what was a derelict machine shed. Participants and other volunteers have renovated an old, overgrown orchard – making it accessible to all.

Participants undertake gardening tasks such as weeding, sowing seeds and planting a variety of vegetables, fruit and flowers. Some people attend just to relax in the tranquillity of the garden. Participants have grown many vegetables, including a huge pumpkin that was cooked in the school kitchen into soup and pumpkin pie. They have also undertaken conservation tasks such as wildlife surveys, and pond clearance.

The Orchard Shed Project holds regular open-by-invitation events which offer green activities to all visitors. The project has opened up volunteering opportunities and helped to increase the number of community users of the site.

Before coming to the project I wouldn’t have dreamed I would enjoy gardening, but the way it is presented here is both relaxing and good physical exercise. I feel good after I’ve been.
(Participant in The Orchard Shed Project)

It’s amazing that there is such a place in the heart of Margate. I hope that it continues to grow.
(Garden visitor)
The Wildwood Project

Environmental conservation
Lead organisation: Wildwood Trust
Herne Bay, Kent
01227 712 111
info@wildwoodtrust.org
wildwoodtrust.org
https://facebook.com/wildwoodtrust

Wildwood Trust is a British wildlife charity that runs a wildlife park set in 42 acres of ancient woodland in Kent. The Wildwood Project provided an opportunity for people experiencing mental health problems to learn new skills, build confidence, and work in the tranquil environment of an ancient woodland. Participants were of varied ages and backgrounds.

Participants worked with the ranger team under the guidance of a volunteer coordinator, to learn skills in woodland management. Participants took part in clearing invasive non-native plants, keeping ditches working, laying new pathways for visitors, and helping build enclosures for endangered wildlife. They built flower beds, created a new composting system and helped to build an outdoor woodland classroom for Wildwood Trust's education team.

It’s great to see volunteers from all backgrounds working with the rangers on different projects – to see them gaining confidence. (Bob Salter, head of the Friends of Wildwood volunteer group)

What next?
The trust is seeking funding to continue its inclusive volunteering programme and cover the cost of employing a volunteer coordinator. The trust continues to work with participants but without any one-to-one support until new funding is secured.

Participants reported improvements in:
- confidence
- communication skills
- social interaction
- time-keeping
- practical woodland management skills.

Wildwood Trust benefited directly from:
- improvements to the wildlife park
- personal interaction with participants
- staff interaction
- greater awareness of mental health problems.
York House Community Garden

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: York House Centre and Milton Keynes Mind
Stony Stratford, Buckinghamshire
01908 563 361
york-house.org.uk

York House Community Gardens has transformed the overgrown grounds of a youth and community arts centre into allotment-style plots for use by community groups including people with mental health problems.

What started out as an idea to run a hose pipe and get people to dig over some unused land has become a major community asset in Stony Stratford, with over 200 people from 10 community groups enjoying the benefits of getting together to grow fruit and vegetables. People using Milton Keynes Mind’s services were involved at every stage of the project, from the early development of the grant proposal to the engagement of a garden supervisor. Because of this, participants feel a strong sense of pride and ownership.

A variety of community groups (including Milton Keynes Mind, Headway MK – for people with acquired brain injuries, Women’s Institute, York House Youth Clubs and Stony in Bloom) took charge of the plots in April 2011. Initially, some groups had not appreciated how much hard work gardening can be in the available time, and garden maintenance suffered. This was addressed by recruiting more groups including a local gardener who was keen to share his skills. Some spare land was given to a group of people using mental health services, enabling them to produce a commercial crop.

Led by Volunteer Project Manager Alain Welch, the project continues to flourish and involves people of all ages from two years old to those over 70. A diverse community of gardeners have shared their skills and knowledge to create an attractive and productive community garden that is admired throughout the town.

What next?
The project is consulting users about developing a social enterprise which would enable more people to benefit from ecotherapy. This could include a local market for a ‘veg box’ scheme, and the community garden’s new polytunnel will help get it started. The project has also been approached by other community spaces to see if similar gardens could be created at other sites. With new local funding streams and commissioners expressing the need for ‘medium wellbeing interventions’ the future looks promising.

Garden users have expressed their desire for formal training to supplement the knowledge gained by attending the project, and this is currently being investigated by the training department. There is also potential for participants to work with people in their own homes to promote growing and there are plans to establish a community orchard. The project is vibrant and well-placed to continue its current activities and expand into new areas.

I can talk about anything. It’s worth getting up for. It makes me feel good to be part of something that’s just for us.
(York House Community Gardener)
LEAVES is a social enterprise that provides work and training for people experiencing mental health problems. The Access to Stanton Woods project employs people experiencing mental health problems to construct woodland pathways, boardwalks, bridges and information areas enabling pedestrian and wheelchair access. Although participants are provided with support on the project, these are real jobs and the increased self-confidence participants experience enable them to feel and be more independent.

During the course of the Ecominds funding, LEAVES has collaborated on the project with Swindon Borough Council Ranger Service, the local Primary Care Trust, Community Mental Health Teams and other third sector mental health organisations.
UK Youth is a charity at the heart of a national network of organisations dedicated to supporting young people to realise their potential. The charity runs the Avon Tyrrell Outdoor Activity Centre in the New Forest and works to develop and promote non-formal learning opportunities for all.

The Avon Tyrrell Eco Health project provides opportunities for adults with mental health problems to get back into work or training, and to build confidence, relationships and self-esteem. Participants engage in three-month placements during which they carry out gardening, horticulture, grounds maintenance and conservation projects at the Avon Tyrrell Outdoor Activity Centre. Participants find the work rewarding as they can see the benefits for the young people who use the centre.

The project team offers participants personal support helps them to develop long-term skills for the future. The local community mental health team assists with referrals and vocational support.

The project is driven by the participants through a user forum and peer support network. Feedback from the 65 people who participated in the Ecominds project has been overwhelmingly positive and the environment at the outdoor activity centre has been significantly enhanced.

I had a great time here. Everyone has been really friendly and supportive and this experience has helped me to gain confidence. (Matt, Avon Tyrrell Eco Health participant, who is now working in a nursery)

The project is such a valuable resource... it is inclusive, validating and has had a positive profound impact on many people. (Dr Mike Groves, BM MRCPsych)

What next?
UK Youth is actively seeking alternate funding to enable the project to continue into the future.

An independent evaluation by Professor Carl Parsons of the University of Greenwich outlined the project’s positive impact on participants, collaborating agencies and the wider community. Interventions like the Avon Tyrrell Eco Health project result in savings to other agencies supporting people with mental health problems. A placement on the project equates to estimated savings of £7,000.
Life Cycle UK provides generously subsidised refurbished bikes, one-to-one cycle training and basic bike maintenance training to give people the confidence to start cycling and keep cycling independently. The charity’s guided group cycle rides encourage participants to experience the benefits of regular exercise and provide opportunities to build friendships with people who empathise with their situations.

Bike Minded brings the benefits of cycling to people in the Bristol area who are experiencing emotional or mental health problems. Through regular supported group rides, the project has enabled people to get out into nature on a bike and experience all the joys and freedoms that cycling offers, building participants’ confidence and self-esteem and improving their mental wellbeing.

It’s great that you can self-refer without the embarrassment of having to get a mental health professional to do it for you. (Bike Minded participant)

I was extremely nervous going on the first ride and it poured with rain. However, I increasingly found that I enjoyed riding. At that point it was the only thing that I did enjoy. (Bike Minded participant)

What next?
The success of the project has helped Life Cycle UK to secure funding from The Henry Smith Charity, which will help to support the project for the next three years, and funding from Bristol City Council. Additional funding from South Gloucestershire Council will establish a Bike Minded project in the East Fringe area of South Gloucestershire.

Over the life of the Ecominds grant, Bike Minded has:

- supported over 100 individuals
- delivered up to 40 supported group cycle rides per year
- provided 40 low cost refurbished bikes
- taught 20 people bike maintenance skills
- provided 40 cycle training sessions
- recruited and trained 18 volunteers to support group rides
- helped four people back into employment.

60% of participants recorded feeling safer on roads and more confident cycling as a result of their participation in the project.
Petroc is a Further Education (FE) college with main campuses in Barnstaple and Tiverton. Ecominds funding enabled the college to develop its ECOArt on Prescription project to encourage people experiencing mental health problems to get outdoors and be creative.

The project gives participants the opportunity to improve their mental health and enhance local spaces. They attend a series of art classes and work in groups to develop new skills and techniques. Following initial classroom-based sessions students go outdoors to be inspired by nature, visually recording their experiences in sketchbook portfolios which are later worked into a series of colourful designs. During the field trips students identify a public space in need of improvement, which they feel could be enhanced by a public art work. Students are proud to see their colourful designs transformed into an art installation benefiting the public space.

What next?
ECOArt on Prescription will be delivered at new venues across North Devon. Petroc is developing good working relationships with local GPs and other medical professionals, who are supporting the projects with constant referrals of new students.

- Attendance was high and participants’ wellbeing levels improved across the three courses.
- Participants developed social relationships.
- Many participants decided to continue their education, with several completing a Level 1 programme and some progressing to degree level. Without the project, most participants would not have had access to such opportunities for learning and qualification.

I’ve always suffered with anxieties – debilitating in many ways. I feel a lot calmer when I’m being creative and this is a precious gift for me to find – much better than any medication. (ECOArt on Prescription participant)

I feel liberated when I’m doing art work. No one probes into my private life. I can leave that behind for those special two hours to create something positive using swirls, shapes, patterns and gorgeous colour from the photos and designs within the park. (ECOArt on Prescription participant)
Environment in Mind

Environmental conservation

Lead organisation: Alabaré and The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)

Salisbury, Wiltshire

01271 338 091

alabare.co.uk

@AlabareUK

Alabaré is a charity creating innovative community projects that respond to a diverse range of needs and encourage people to achieve their goals through flexible training and support. A collaboration between Alabaré and TCV, the Environment In Mind project offers people experiencing mental health problems with accredited training in countryside skills and outdoor volunteering opportunities. Participants’ are supported towards recovery and inclusion with help from Alabaré support staff and horticultural expertise and training provided by TCV.

Participants take part in countryside activities that benefit both their personal recovery and the local environment. The project enables participants to:

• take part in practical conservation and training opportunities
• tackle social stigma
• experience a sense of achievement and increase feelings of self worth
• enjoy improved physical health
• move towards employment and a more independent life.

It’s been so good to get the chance to go and help maintain beautiful places.
(Environment in Mind participant)

It’s nice to get out of the town and do something worthwhile.
(Environment in Mind participant)
Go Wild, Stay Well

Environmental conservation

Lead organisation:
Mind in Taunton and West Somerset
Taunton, Somerset
mindtws.org.uk

Go Wild, Stay Well was run by Mind in Taunton and West Somerset (MindTWS) in conjunction with Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT). The scheme offered ecotherapy volunteering opportunities on nature reserves to people experiencing mental health problems.

Participants took part in 10 half-day sessions, getting involved in conservation work on several nature reserves around Somerset. The reserves included: Langford Heathfield, Quants, Boon’s Copse, Fyne Court and Thurlbear Wood. Work has also been carried out on Exmoor National Park and the National Trust.

The project helped get people together and get them outdoors; building their confidence, reducing their isolation and improving their employability. The project also built participants’ capacity to take on employment and gave them a greater ability to cope with life.

The importance of ecotherapy as an alternative to talking therapy is highlighted as part of all the mental health services offered by MindTWS, with all participants being encouraged to take advantage of ecotherapy opportunities.

The project has studied the long-term benefits of the scheme. In 2012 - two years after the project began - everyone who had participated in Go Wild, Stay Well was invited to a meeting to help evaluate the longer-term benefits of ecotherapy. The results of this meeting revealed:

- a continued 10% improvement in participants feeling more positive
- a continued 9% improvement in participants feeling more healthy
- a 22% increase in participants understanding the importance of exercise.

What next?

MindTWS is currently seeking QIPP (Quality, Innovation, Productivity and Prevention) funding from the NHS to pilot a programme that supports people who are starting to show signs of a mental health problem. By providing support early on the project aims to prevent more serious mental health problems that are more expensive to treat and more traumatic for the patient.

By reducing the need for GP appointments, hospital admissions and specialist interventions, savings to NHS budgets can be made. If successful, Go Wild, Stay Wild will continue to track these savings (modelled at 5%, 15% and 20%) by assessing people currently participating on the project both now, and in follow-up telephone calls up to 12 months after they leave the project. The project will aim for a 10 per cent reduction in people’s reliance on the NHS.

In the event of further funding, Go Wild, Stay Wild will work in partnership with the National Trust and others to offer positive volunteering opportunities on nature reserves for people with mental health problems. The project will improve the overall mental wellbeing of participants and also make a positive impact on the environment.

MindTWS believes the Go Wild, Stay Wild project would be of particular benefit to young people experiencing early psychosis, and intends to work closely with the local Specialist Team for Early Psychosis to look at ways of engaging 16 to 25 year olds.
Green Links

Social and therapeutic horticulture

Lead organisation: Bath Mind

Bath, Somerset

01225 316 199

bathmind.org.uk/ecominds.htm

Greenlinks works with people experiencing mental health problems to support recovery and promote healthy lifestyles. Supported by a horticultural therapist, participants learn new skills, further their knowledge of nature and horticulture, take part in exercise and relaxation, and meet new people. Greenlinks promotes using the natural environment as a setting for restorative activity. The project encourages participants to take part in planning for the growing season, and in planting, nurturing and harvesting produce which they also get to eat!

So far, participants have converted a large area of a community allotment site from uncultivated wilderness to a highly productive and visually attractive organic garden. The site now contains mixed planting areas, raised beds, a polytunnel, a composting toilet, outdoor seating and a large wooden shed for storage and shelter.

At the end of its first growing season Greenlinks was awarded ‘Best Allotment by a Group or School’ in the Royal Horticultural Society’s Bath in Bloom competition, delighting participants who had contributed to the work. In subsequent years the project has won a silver award and a silver gilt award in the same competition.

It helps me keep a positive frame of mind by achieving and making friendships with a good cross-section of people.

(Greenlinks participant)

What next?

Greenlinks is moving towards a sustainable independent future reducing reliance on grant income. Building on their growing confidence, members are being encouraged to take control of their group and its activities.

As management by participants increases, project staffing costs are reduced. Fundraising by the membership meets everyday running costs for seeds, compost and tools. Funding plans include a volunteer garden maintenance team undertaking paid work for Bath Mind supported housing properties, the production and sale of a Greenlinks calendar, and applications to small local grants available to peer-led projects.

Project reserves help to fund horticultural training for members seeking to develop their skills and knowledge in a formal way. Reserves also fund therapeutic gardening sessions led by a qualified horticultural therapist to meet the needs of members who are at an early stage of the recovery process.

Greenlinks is building a network with other local eco-projects so that there is a wider range of activities that members can access, particularly in the winter period when there is less active work to be done on the site.
It is now the Make and Bake group’s responsibility to make soup for these bookings which in turn generates income for the farm. The group has also developed a range of products to pilot at local markets. The introduction of a polytunnel at the garden site has allowed the group to grow plants from seed and sell them at local markets too. Participants are encouraged to attend the external markets to help with sales and promotion.

What next?
Bath City Farm has received funding from various sources to continue the Grow It! Cook It! Share It! project for a further two years. Funders include the Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health partnership, Garfield Weston Foundation and the Quartet Community Foundation.
The Grow It, Eat It project has helped people to grow and cook healthy food as a means of tackling mental and physical health challenges. The project has run in two stages. During stage one, participants worked with a gardening tutor at a community garden to grow their own vegetables and take part in Green Gym activities. During stage two, participants have taken their harvest into the kitchen, working with a cookery tutor to prepare fresh, healthy meals.

What next?
Grow It, Eat It has benefited from a mentor programme which trains participants to help others become engaged. The project has now trained a group of committed mentors that supports the delivery and development of the project. These mentors are keen to take their experience further with future initiatives, and six have become regular farm volunteers helping to support others to live more active and healthy lifestyles and to grow fruit and vegetables.

Feedback about the project from participants and service providers has been overwhelmingly positive. All participants surveyed after taking part in the project felt that their health and wellbeing had improved measurably due to:
• weight loss
• increased motivation to cook healthy meals
• increased skills in growing fruit and vegetables
• improved confidence
• social opportunities resulting in friendships
• positive benefits of community networking.

The exercise is getting me fitter and I like being outside. My communication skills are improving and I am able to help other people in the group, which is helping my confidence. (Mark, Grow It, Eat It participant)
Growing Links

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Shaw Trust
Basingstoke, Hampshire
01256 361 964 | 078 9479 9530
shaw-trust.org.uk

Shaw Trust supports disabled and disadvantaged people towards employment and helps employers to support them in the workplace. The trust's Growing Links project supports people with mental health problems in primary mental health care in Basingstoke to take part in ecotherapy activities at two unused allotment sites. Two dedicated officers work with participants, enabling them to become active and acquire skills in planting trees and growing plants and vegetables.

Growing Links helps people who are unemployed, inactive, depressed, anxious, agoraphobic, and socially excluded, to gain new skills, become active, and work alongside other members of the community to improve the local environment. The project provides a supportive learning environment and delivers horticultural training enabling participants to gain qualifications and work experience.

Fantastic experience! I have a glow of satisfaction from contributing to the community. (Lee, Growing Links participant)

What next?
Future plans for Growing Links involve developing a community food growing scheme, enabling participants to complete additional horticulture training and take part in an expanding social enterprise. Shaw Trust will continue to review participants' progression, needs and requirements and support them to get fit for the world of work.

Over three years, Growing Links has improved the lives of 128 people. Participants reported that the project contributed to increased wellbeing, uplifted mood, reduced anxiety, and challenged stigma associated with mental health problems.
New Beginnings

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: The Growing Space
Wincanton, Somerset
01963 31842 | 01963 34563
balsamcentre.org.uk

The Growing Space is a registered charity that forms part of the Healthy Living Partnership and Children’s Centre based at the Balsam Centre in Wincanton. The New Beginnings Project supports people experiencing mental health problems to grow vegetables, herbs and fruit communally in a spirit of mutual cooperation. Based in gardens surrounding The Balsam Centre (a healthy living and children’s centre), the project is open to people of all ages who are experiencing severe and enduring mental health problems.

People are referred onto the project by a range of practitioners through The Growing Space’s partnership with the healthy living centre, and also through self-referral. The project caters for the needs of all individuals, and there is no segregation according to types of disability or disadvantage. All participants’ input is equally valued.

The gardens feature lawns for socialising and exploring, an ornamental garden, a productive space where herbs and vegetables are grown. Herbs propagated for New Beginnings developing social enterprise, and vegetables are available for home consumption. New Beginnings participants also collaborated with children from the centre’s pre-school and under 3s nursery to develop an orchard on the site.

New Beginnings promotes independent gardening, enabling participants to discover horticultural activities that motivate them and contribute to their recovery. The project guides people from self-reflection and skills assessment through to future planning, and offers pathways into volunteering or employment.
organicARTS runs an arts and education centre on a working organic farm in the outskirts of Exeter. The centre is a hub for learning about rural and environmental issues and the arts.

Ecominds funding allowed organicARTS to run a minibus (from central Exeter to the farm) twice a week for people experiencing mental health problems, enabling them to volunteer in the community garden and elsewhere on the farm. Participants contributed to adding new features to the garden. Currently the farm features a pond, beehives, a fruit cage, a dry stone wall with embedded flowers, a herb garden, a renovated shed, hurdles, and a wall made of recycled tyres in the car park.

Participants helped to maintain the farm’s educational trail and with a range of seasonal farm work. They also took part in monthly walks around the trail with a herbalist to record plants with a view to making educational resources for visitors.

Now I’ve got more confidence in dealing with a large number of people. (Hugh, organicARTS Community Garden participant)

It’s given me something to look forward to each week. (Brian, organicARTS Community Garden participant)
Project participants took part in an evaluation study of the project which revealed that they:
- valued the learning opportunities offered by the project saying that these meet their unique learning needs
- felt empowered and enabled
- experienced improved confidence, self-esteem and feelings of self-worth
- valued being part of a group and feeling that they were a part of a supportive community
- benefited from the supportive, non-threatening and non-judgemental learning environment

Exeter Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) offers people with experience of mental health problems access to creative horticultural activities to boost their skills and confidence. Participants develop their skills in at a local community garden based at organicARTS, on the outskirts of Exeter. Participants can choose to complete an accredited Personal Development Through Horticulture course (NOCN Level 2).

Participants self-refer or are referred from a range of partner services. They attend two days per week for ten weeks in a learning programme of supported, structured activity. One day is classroom-based, the other is hands-on.

Participants typically have no formal qualifications, and demonstrate low aspirations and poor experiences of learning environments. Some have substance misuse issues and many have challenges managing long-term conditions such as anxiety and depression, paranoid schizophrenia or chronic low self-esteem and confidence.

What next?
Exeter CVS has worked to set up a consortium, Create Connections, to work with other Ecominds projects and third sector providers of mental health and wellbeing services to develop a full menu of therapeutic and developmental opportunities for people experiencing mental health problems. The new consortium will offer supportive placements and opportunities to participants, and present commissioners with a good-quality, coherent menu of varied interventions that are cost-effective, well-governed, and can demonstrate clear outcomes and impact.

Before the course, I was a shy person with low self-esteem, no confidence, and building frustration. I knew there was more to life, and to me, than being unemployed without prospects. After attending the first session and meeting everyone and seeing that had similar issues to me, I realised that this course and the people within it was going to help.

Being on this course has opened so many doors for me. I am now a full-time Administration Apprentice with Groundwork South West, working with people who are unemployed and helping them to progress into employment. I want to help more people to have this life-changing experience. (Personal Development Through Horticulture participant)
**Pride and Prejudice**

**Social and therapeutic horticulture**

**Lead organisation: Colebrook**

**Plymouth, Devon**

[colebrooksw.org](http://colebrooksw.org)

Colebrook provides supported accommodation and outreach work, as well as a range of community-based services promoting social inclusion and giving vulnerable people a voice. The Pride and Prejudice project enabled people experiencing mental health problems to take an active role in re-designing local green spaces in Plymouth in a positive and supportive environment.

Participants took part in practical hands-on activities and creative planning, working in collaboration with the people who use the green spaces to put their ideas into action. The project helped to raise awareness and challenged stigma associated with mental health problems, showing the wider community that everyone has something to offer.

---

**Having spent seven years unemployed due to mental distress and experiencing some really dark days, I am really excited to have the opportunity to return to the working world and use the insight I gained to help others to achieve their goals. Pride and Prejudice gave me this chance and I think that there need to be more projects like this.**

(Pride and Prejudice participant)
Print on Prescription

Nature art and craft

Lead organisation: Double Elephant Print Workshop
Exeter, Devon
079 7618 5644
doubleelephant.org.uk

Coming to the print workshops has been the focus of my week. Making prints is fantastic – it brings you to being in the moment which is great if you are feeling anxious or depressed.
(Print on Prescription participant)

What next?
Double Elephant Print Workshop is working with other local service providers who have formed the Create Connections consortium with the aim of joining up local creative services that contribute to better mental health.

Participants’ wellbeing scores increased from 44% to 60% over the latest 10-week course. Participants’ art work is now being shown in a touring exhibition in Exeter.

Double Elephant Print Workshop is a fine art printmaking studio and social enterprise that provides courses, resources, support and tuition for beginner to professional artists. Double Elephant’s Print on Prescription (POP) project provides supported art-making activity for adults experiencing mild to moderate mental health problems. Over the course of 10 weekly sessions, participants learn a range of fine art printmaking skills tutored by professional artist-tutors with an NHS support worker and dedicated volunteer in attendance. They can then go on to extend skills and work on projects that they devise, many of which result in public exhibition.

Ecominds funding enabled Print on Prescription participants to visit a farm, a city park, formal and wildlife gardens and other countryside locations to use the Devon landscape to inspire their work in the studio. The project provided a creative focus, built confidence, developed social skills and contributed to giving participants a sense of purpose and achievement. The project team signposted participants to other outdoor projects and opportunities.
Roots Gardening Service

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Help and Care
Bournemouth, Dorset
0300 111 3303
helpandcare.org.uk/our-social-enterprises/roots/roots-services.aspx

Charitable company Help and Care provides a range of services and activities helping older people and carers of all ages to maintain independence and quality of life.

Roots Gardening Service is used by older people who can no longer manage their garden, and organisations and businesses in need of gardening and ground maintenance. The service is delivered by a supervised group of volunteers who have experience of mental health problems.

Ecominds funding has enabled Help and Care to expand the support it provides to Roots Gardening Service volunteers.

I used to spend a lot of time on my own – I didn’t want to leave the house. I slept constantly and felt like I had nothing to get up for – I felt alien. Now I am part of the team and I feel like I have something to get up for in the morning. I enjoy the fresh air and gardening and I get a real sense of achievement and satisfaction when we finish a garden.

I have no idea what I would be doing if it wasn’t for Roots, it’s done so much for me. It’s pointed me in the right direction and helped me to learn new skills such as paving and building compost bins. Now that I have built up some experience I am hoping that it will lead to me being able to get some paid work. (Roots Gardening Service participant)
The Sharpham Trust is an educational charity that provides opportunities and educational facilities encouraging respect for the natural world. It offers various courses and programmes involving mindfulness, environmental activities, forest school, crafts, conservation and volunteering.

The Spring to Life project offers young people aged 14 to 24 who have direct experience of mental health problems a series of recovery-focused environmental activity programmes tailored to address their specific needs. Activities are designed in consultation with mental health specialists and the young people themselves, and take place at the Sharpham Estate – 550 acres of mixed farmland, woodland, rivers and gardens. Activities focus on improving physical and mental health and supporting environmental conservation.

Long-term volunteer mentors with experience of mental health problems support young participants on 10-day placements while working towards units of a National Diploma in environmental conservation.

Staff and volunteer mentors are trained in mental health first aid and staff have regular contact with support workers and referral organisations to stay aware of participants’ support requirements.

Participants have reported that the project helps them to regain confidence, reconnect with friends and feel more positive about the future. Many enjoy the project so much that they continue to volunteer long after their placement has finished.

I feel as though I have a new energy and enthusiasm for outdoor education and working with people. I have learnt to enjoy life again and look forward to the future. (Spring to Life volunteer mentor)

A survey of 16 former participants to establish progression since leaving the course revealed that:

- 100% felt the project had helped their long-term ability to manage their mental health and wellbeing
- 90% progressed to either employment, volunteering, college or further training

What next?

Ecotherapy activities continue with open volunteering days and the trust is applying to various funding streams to secure future funding. The project will retain its focus on young people, with an emphasis on helping them to improve their mental, emotional and physical wellbeing through outdoor activities, social interaction and learning new skills. The charity aims to increase interaction between young participants and local communities, which will lessen stigma associated with mental health problems and improve participants’ wellbeing and employability.

The Sharpham Trust has taken on the tenancy of an 80-acre farm and gained planning permission to build a bunkhouse and offer short-term respite stays and longer-term programmes focused on recovery. This cost-effective way of engaging people in ecotherapy will open the project to a wider audience. There is also the option of developing yurt accommodation which would immerse people more with the outdoors.
GB Boardriders CIC works with disadvantaged children and young people to use Cornwall’s natural environment to facilitate and enable sustained, social and personal change. The community interest company’s Surf to Success project was a specialised surfing intervention programme that was carefully developed and delivered, over four years, to meet the specific needs of vulnerable young people.

The 12-week surf programme was delivered by a team of experts across several beaches in Cornwall. It engaged young people aged between 13 and 16 who had been (or were at risk of being) excluded from school and, because of this, were at risk of developing mental health problems.

An evaluation study of Surf to Success completed by Plymouth University showed positive results:

- 25 young participants were surveyed and reported increased life satisfaction and self-esteem.
- The Director of Progress at the school said the project was “life-changing for many students”.

What next?

In 2012, GB Boardriders CIC launched an early intervention mentoring Forest and Beach School programme called Shifting Horizons. Eight Year 9 students from a local secondary school took part in a six-week programme. They then mentored 28 Year 8 students for six subsequent weeks, teaching them the skills they acquired on their initial training.

GB Boardriders CIC will continue to develop and pilot other programmes with children and young people between the age of 10 and 24 years of age, based on learning from Surf to Success. It plans to extend this work through the Shifting Horizons Forest and Beach School programme, and to continue to engage with local schools.
The Green Team: Open to All

Environmental conservation

Lead organisation: Stroud Valleys Project
Stroud, Gloucestershire
01453 753 358
stroudvalleysproject.org
/f/stroudvalleysproject

Stroud Valleys Project is a dynamic community-based and volunteer-focused organisation. It works to protect and enhance the local environment – increasing biodiversity and sustainable development to make the Stroud Valleys area a better, healthier place to live for present and future generations.

The Green Team project is designed to help people with mental health problems get better and acquire new skills during practical conservation sessions. It’s an open, socially inclusive group for people from all walks of life, who enjoy working outdoors and learning new things.

Volunteers can carry out a range of nature conservation activities at green spaces around Stroud District, including: planting and laying hedges, planting wildflowers and bulbs, creating bog gardens, managing scrub and making bird, bat and insect boxes.

The project also runs Women Outside Working (WOW), which provides a supportive environment for women interested in growing food and conservation.

I like coming out to help because I learn new things and I always feel valued. It makes me feel better about myself.
(Member of The Green Team)

I’m looking for work and haven’t got much money. It really gets me down and makes me feel bad about myself. Often I feel so bad I don’t want to do anything; but after coming here and working with my group in the sunshine, I always feel more cheerful. They are my friends now.
(Member of The Green Team)

What next?
Funding has been secured to run WOW once a week for an additional six months. SVP is seeking funding to reinstate and develop The Green Team. In the meantime, it welcomes all potential volunteers to its other programmes.
The Outdoor Club

Environmental conservation

Lead organisation: The Outdoor Club

Bude, St Austell, Barnstaple and North Devon, Devon

The Outdoor Club enabled adults with experience of mental health problems to participate in an 11-week programme of bushcraft activities delivered on four beautiful National Trust sites. Participants took part in a range of activities, which included identifying flora and fauna, fire-building, and green craft.

Participants were encouraged to reconnect with themselves, with others, and with the natural world. Each session included a period set aside for participants to gather together and talk about what was on their mind – if they chose to do so. These discussions rarely required prompting and addressed subjects such as medications, recovery and the mental health system. Participants particularly valued the group not being part of the medical model.

The project established good working relationships with head wardens at the National Trust sites. Participants were able to access National Trust land in new ways and built confidence to approach wardens directly to discuss their projects. One group was given permission to choose their own patch of land and use it to continue to meet weekly for a year after they finished their programme at The Outdoor Club.
Thyme to Heal

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Green Lane Herbs
Totnes, Devon
greenlaneherbs.co.uk

Green Lane Herbs promotes the use of wild and cultivated medicinal plants for simple medicines and nourishment. It has created the Althaea Herbal Healing Garden – a biodiverse, species-rich site set on three acres with a pond, orchard, meadow, medicinal herb garden, vegetable garden, kitchen, library, and workshop. The site also supports chickens, ponies and sheep. It is a place of tranquillity as well as an educational resource.

Between 2010 and 2013 the Thyme to Heal project provided supported therapeutic horticulture sessions at the garden for people experiencing mental health problems. Participants took part in a wide variety of gardening and land management tasks, which included scything, haymaking, hedge laying, milking sheep and animal care. Sessions were built around a shared group lunch where participants helped to prepare and cook meals using ingredients from the garden.

Being here gives me a sense of peace, an ability to focus on work, and a connection to other people. (Thyme to Heal participant)
Tom’s Farm is a social enterprise based on Dartmoor that provides support for vulnerable young people from across Devon. The project is set on a working organic farm where young people gain confidence and make new friends while developing a range of skills. Participants take part in practical projects and activities including working with horses, learning to ride, rural skills training, healthy eating, gardening, carpentry, green woodwork and other creative activities.

The project is run by paid staff and volunteers. The whole team, including staff, volunteers and horses, contributes to providing a nurturing, empowering environment. Young people who have struggled to engage anywhere else are now enthusiastic participants at Tom’s Farm.

One of my clients, a seriously abused young girl, has found a place where she is comfortable to interact with other young people. Trained by experienced staff and encouraged by other young people at the farm, she is regaining control in her life through her new-found ability to ride.

(Risk and Behaviour Project Worker, Young Devon)

- Ecominds funding in 2010 to 2011 enabled the project to develop after its pilot phase and to support a further 20 vulnerable young people through its three-month programme.
- Feedback received from the young people, and from those who know and support them, was extremely positive.
- Several participants became Young Leaders, who now support other young people to participate in the project.
Work Inclusive, Come Grow with Us

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Milestones Trust
Bristol
milestonestrust.org.uk

Milestones Trust is a charity that offers safe, person-centred support to vulnerable people. The trust’s Work Inclusive, Come Grow With Us project enabled people to produce food to be sold and gain valuable employment skills in teamwork, creative thinking and self-management that helped them to move towards meaningful employment. Participants were involved in planning, seed-sowing, propagation, pruning, weeding, digging, composting, carpentry, hard landscaping, crop protection, crop-feeding and harvesting.

Participants produced food in four locations and created new growing spaces in six locations. Participants worked with eight care homes and a community centre, supplying vegetables to one care home for over three months.

Participants worked with two local community centres to renovate a shared courtyard and a neglected garden, developing wildlife and vegetable areas. The site is adjacent to a cycle path that is well-known locally as a wildlife corridor.

Two project groups were user-led, with participants considering planting times, weather and priorities to make decisions on what to do each week.

Fostering relationships in the community has been really beneficial. Visitors to the community centre have been able to see our project participants making a positive impact on the shared spaces.

(Milestones Trust staff member)

Impact
The positive impact on some participants exceeded expectations. Participants were overwhelmingly positive about their time on the project, reporting benefits such as enjoying exercise and fresh air and acquiring new skills and knowledge.

- The project engaged 21 participants.
- 1 moved into full-time education.
- 1 volunteer gained employment at a community garden project.
- 8 care homes benefited from the project, with 1 of these commenting on the financial benefits of the ‘grow your own’ food scheme.
- 1 local gardener offered spring work placements as a result of the project.

What next
Milestones Trust has incorporated ecotherapy into its Recovery Pathway service, which provides participants with links to other care sector agencies and networks.
Borderland Voices works across the Staffordshire Moorlands to raise public awareness and understanding of mental health by delivering accessible arts projects. The charity offers people a safe and creative space for self-expression. Borderland Voices’ A Breath of Fresh Air project provides opportunities for people – with or without experience of mental health problems – to work together in a supportive environment.

Professional artists and craftspeople lead participants in environmental and arts sessions which often begin with countryside visits. The project enables participants to find inspiration in nature – with trees, wildflowers or beautiful views – while gently building levels of physical activity outdoors.

Urban and rural landscapes and topics such as ‘Natural versus recycled materials’ and ‘Food for free’ have inspired a wide range of artwork that includes creative writing, painting, photography, environmental sculpture, felting, poetry walks, filming, puppets, drama, a vegetable orchestra and more. Some sessions have created permanent artworks which continue to enhance the area.

Participants’ art has been displayed at major public events (such as the Just So Festival, Art in the Park, Apple Day, and several craft fairs) celebrating local creativity and demonstrating how much people experiencing mental health problems can contribute to culturally rich community life.

What next?

Borderland Voices plans to continue offering a safe, welcoming and stimulating space in which people can explore their creativity. A Breath of Fresh Air has sparked ongoing interest in using the outdoor environment for inspiration and wellbeing.

Ecominds has encouraged Borderland Voices to build enduring partnerships. The Ecominds Supporting Change grant enabled a thorough review of the charity’s organisational strategy and a redesign of its website, which will include content promoting the success of A Breath of Fresh Air.

Ecominds funding enabled Borderland Voices to:

- initiate and run three craft emporia in a redundant local building to raise funds, showcase local craftspeople and give regular participants an opportunity to present Borderland Voices to the public
- publish and sell two editions of a calendar featuring creative writing and photos of artwork produced by participants
- engage with three times as many groups and 13 times as many individuals as agreed in the initial intended project outcomes, thus reaching many more people than planned
- provide continued support to regular participants
- work with artists’ collective Stone and Water to extend the project to the whole of the Peak District (via the Ancient Landscapes spin-off project)
- arrange for participants to meet with the County Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing.

The project inspires novices to aspire and to create amazing artwork, drawing inspiration from our wonderful local landscapes. With so many people finding it hard to cope, Borderland Voices’ work is vital to combating austerity. (Charlotte Atkins, Staffordshire Moorlands District Councillor and Staffordshire County Councillor)
Independent youth charity WAYC works with young people on projects across Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull. WAYC’s Green Dreams project offers outdoor learning opportunities to young people who have experience of bullying, self-harm, eating disorders, anxiety or depression. Participants experience the therapeutic effects of nature while making positive friendships, developing coping strategies, and building confidence and emotional resilience.

With Ecominds funding the project was able to support three groups of young people to design, develop and manage projects in the following three areas:

- In Solihull, young people engaged in activities at Brueton Park – developing display boards and walking trails around the park for the benefit of visitors.
- In Nuneaton, participants developed a garden for a care and respite home.
- In Leamington, participants developed a wellbeing garden outside of the WAYC office that was opened by Dame Carol Black, then National Director for Health and Work.

The garden welcomes a number of visitors, many of them local young people who are actively helping to transform the garden. Participants often engage in discussions about why the project has been set up, which helps them to examine and de-stigmatisate their mental health problems.
Greener Future engages people living with mental health problems in conservation work. The project promotes good physical and mental health in a supported environment. Participants contribute to maintaining and enhancing areas of natural wildlife accessed and enjoyed by the whole community, including three community garden sites in Birmingham.

Participants are supported through the project with training, mentoring, and hands-on activities that help them to acquire skills and apply them to accomplish project goals.

Greener Future is delivered in partnership with the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country, whose expertise in wildlife and garden management ensures that all participants have access to knowledge and skills that will support their personal growth. Greener Future participants work alongside Wildlife Trust volunteers, helping to promote awareness of mental health problems.

I needed to get out of the house and do something physical, something where I could use my day properly. I can do that now, and I’m learning something too.

(Greener Future participant)

While each person had a diagnosis, their participation on the project was not defined by that label. It was about their personalities, their effort to join in, and their willingness to learn and share with others. The project redefined how they were seen by others and, ultimately, how they saw themselves.

(Greener Future project team member)

What next?

Greener Future provides gardening services to office sites and for the residents of properties owned and managed by Future Health and Social Care, and this service is expected to grow as the properties grow. The project will continue to encourage participants and tenants to complete volunteer training as an active aid to recovery.
B Arts is a charity based in North Staffordshire that aims to sustain and develop individuals, groups and communities through their participation in the arts. The charity’s Growing Hearts and Minds project explored links between outdoor creative activity and better mental wellbeing. The project was a partnership between B Arts, Northwood Park, and community housing provider Brighter Futures.

Growing Hearts and Minds was an 18-month programme of artist residencies that explored different ways of being creative outdoors. The project engaged six professional artists who worked closely with local residents and people experiencing mental health problems. Vibrant, friendly, creative workshops allowed participants to develop new skills at their own pace, to connect with nature and to get involved in their local community.

The project offered a programme of seasonal events and activities which included walks, performances, and workshops on photography, music, environmental sculpture, textiles, printing and mixed media. Participants organised public outdoor events relevant to the season which provided them with a positive focus even in the darkest months of the year. They also formed a music ensemble for outdoor performances and worked with children and adults at local infant schools to make willow sculptures. A book documenting their work is online at issuu.com/b-arts ltd/docs/ghamreport

It was great to be outside – I felt inspired.

(Growing Hearts and Minds participant)
Healthy Places, Healthy People

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Solihull Mind
Knowle, Solihull
0121 742 4941
contact@solihullmind.org.uk
solihullmind.org.uk

Solihull Mind’s healthy living and horticulture project – Healthy Places, Healthy People – provides people experiencing mental health problems with training in environmental and conservation skills. Ecominds funding enabled Solihull Mind to expand the project.

Participants take part in activities such as horticulture and conservation training, volunteering with local parks departments, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust workshops, and helping to repopulate native bluebells in a local wood. They also engage in their local community by selling plants, interacting with neighbours and working with other community volunteers.

These activities enhance the local environment and make a positive difference to the community.

The project also provides ongoing pathways for former participants to work alongside the public on conservation and environmental schemes. This helps them to use their new-found skills and to broaden their social contacts.

The project has increased participants’ skills in organic horticulture, conservation work and healthy eating, and eased their personal isolation and social exclusion.

About a third of project participants went on to engage in employment-related activities – six went into paid employment and 11 took up training or voluntary work.

Many people who used the service said they were attracted by the outdoor activity because it allowed them to have more physical space than would have been provided by traditional services. Participants said they felt safe and free to engage with others on the project.

Since starting at the project I have stopped using all other services except for getting a repeat prescription. I stopped drinking a few months after I started and now I have stopped smoking... I get more exercise and cook healthier food. I have got out of debt and learnt to manage my money.

(Healthy Places, Healthy People participant)

Before coming to the site I was depressed and anxious – my life was a mess and I had suicidal thoughts. Now I have a lot more confidence and am able to go into shops without being afraid.

(Healthy Places, Healthy People participant)

What next?
The project has been a successful part of Solihull Mind’s horticulture, conservation and sports service. Before the end of the Ecominds funding, the project team lobbied local mental health commissioners to make them aware of the value of the service to people experiencing mental health problems. The project is highly valued by participants, mental health colleagues and local commissioners.

Healthy Places, Healthy People has been able to continue due to a one-off grant of £20,000 from Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and the support of other local fundraising activities. Solihull Mind is working with commissioners to find longer-term funding as well as looking at grants from the Big Lottery Fund and Lloyds TSB.

The project team maintains a strong working relationship with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and provides them with native flowers to sell, with half the income going towards Healthy Places, Healthy People. The project continues its work engaging the community through annual plant sales and working with the local park ranger to plant indigenous bluebells.
Mindful Green

Social and therapeutic horticulture

Lead organisation: Groundwork West Midlands

Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire

westmidlands.groundwork.org.uk

Groundwork West Midlands helps people and organisations make changes to create better neighbourhoods, to build skills and job prospects, and to live and work in a greener way. The charity’s Mindful Green project delivered a range of outdoor activities for people experiencing mental health problems. Participants were referred to the project by two local mental health service providers: Changes and Growthpoint.

The project aimed to boost confidence, skills, reduce stigma associated with mental health problems, and promote recovery through activities in local green spaces. Activities were varied and participant-led, and included visits to stately homes and other venues.

- Participants reported improved confidence and increased positivity brought about by new friendships, respite for their families, challenging activities, volunteering, and spending time outdoors in the local environment.
- Mindful Green enabled Groundwork West Midlands to develop partnerships with Staffordshire Wildlife, Stoke City Council, Closer to Home Walks and Friends of Park Hall.
- 50 people participated in the project directly.
- At least 100 people participated in the project indirectly.
Shropshire Mind’s On the Way project supported 15 people experiencing mental health problems to research and produce an introductory guide for the Shropshire Way walking route.

To produce the guide, participants visited and walked various sections of the Shropshire Way to identify flora, fauna and places of interest. These activities were combined with desk-based research and consultation with local experts from history groups, ramblers groups, wildlife trusts and with rights of way staff. Participants then worked with a professional design company to produce a layout for the guide. They also interviewed members of a local heritage project, and produced scripts and storyboards, for a podcast on the project.

Over a year, the project offered a varied programme of weekly countryside activities that met with the needs and interests of participants. The activities built unity and team confidence, allowing them to develop their skills and to promote wider community access to the countryside.

The published guide is available as a hard copy or a PDF download.

- Participants contributed a total of 171 person days (855 person hours) to the project.
- The project generated £4,959 of in-kind contributions of time (calculated at £5.80 per hour).
- Over 70% of participants continued volunteering or progressed to part-time employment or education.

I’ve increased in confidence, learnt new skills and shared them with other members in the group. I met staff from the rights of way team and hope to contact them, when the project ends, to do some volunteer work.

(On The Way participant)
Open Activities Work

Aquarius helps individuals and communities to reduce harm, either to themselves or others, from addictive behaviours. Their Open Activities Work project engages participants, in two areas of Birmingham, in a variety of outdoor activities and volunteering opportunities. The project provides a friendly and informal environment and empowers young people to make new friends, develop new interests and to have a positive impact on their local environment and communities.

Ecominds funded a member of staff to work with young people who would not normally have the opportunity or resources to take part in outdoor activities. The project focused on helping young people to help themselves by encouraging them to explore new interests, develop new and existing skills, and have a good time.

One-to-one support (provided by the experienced Erdington Community Project Team) is available to every participant, enabling them to address their own individual challenges and barriers. Project workers provide young people with practical and emotional support and encouragement, and help them to nurture positive attitudes. Through hard work and commitment, and using a range of engagement methods, the young people now demonstrate a close and trusting relationship with each other and with the project workers.

- 20 young people achieved ASDAN awards.
- Four young people received Birmingham City Council Excellence Board awards in 2012.
- Aquarius won the 2012 Children and Young People Now award for Advice and Guidance based on their Ecominds work.
Seeds of Change - Metamorphosis

Nature art and craft

Lead organisation: Escape Community Arts

Stratford-upon-Avon, Studley, Warwickshire

escapecommunityarts.co.uk

Escape Community Arts is a charity that works to promote community cohesion, and health and wellbeing, through participatory arts. The charity’s Seeds of Change project engaged disadvantaged people in a series of contemporary art projects, using ‘metamorphosis’ as a metaphor for the impact of creativity on peoples lives.

Using participatory arts as a tool to foster positive change in individuals and communities, Seeds of Change hosted a series of ‘metamorphosis’ installations and exhibitions to challenge public perception of mental health issues. The project also provided a forum to share good practice and celebrate diversity.

We had a great time building and designing willow and wood sculptures. The work was quite physical, but worth every minute! (Seeds of Change Metamorphosis participant)
The Can Do Crew

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: EnviroAbility
Ross-On-Wye, Herefordshire
01989 763 388
enviroability.org.uk

EnviroAbility is a charity providing and promoting projects that benefit disadvantaged groups of people, the community and the environment. Ecominds funding enabled the charity to engage people experiencing mental health problems in practical environmental work in their local communities.

The Can Do Crew project offers training and volunteering opportunities. Working with local Minds, mental health teams, and local GPs, the project recruits volunteers on a weekly basis to take part in activities such as garden maintenance and clearance, footpath maintenance, and improvements to local parish council sites.

EnviroAbility’s ethos of working with people, rather than with their health problem, has contributed to the project’s success. Over time, local people have come to see the Can Do Crew as a positive part of the community. Participants have been quickly accepted for the contributions they make with the work valued by local people. This interaction between participants and the community helps to challenge the stigma associated with mental health problems.

Key to the success and sustainability of the project is the Community Cabin – a building adjacent to the growing strips where trainees, volunteers and members can socialise and share their experiences. The Community Cabin is a workroom, a venue for courses and a meeting room for group and school visits.

I felt good helping to keep the paths clean and tidy. They told me in the hospital that I would never have a job, but I feel now like maybe I could.
(Can Do Crew member)

What next?
In 2013, EnviroAbility leased 5.5 acres of Organic Farmer and Grower certified land from a model farm close to Ross-on-Wye. This new venture supports people to hire a strip of land to grow their own produce for personal use and enterprise, or to contribute their time to a trainee strip where produce sales cover costs and where surplus can be exchanged with other volunteers for their time.

Participants have reported improvements in health, motivation, social skills and self-esteem
The Meeting of Minds Empowerment Project

Environmental conservation

Lead organisation: South Shropshire Furniture Scheme
Ludlow, Shropshire
01584 877 751
furniturescheme.co.uk

South Shropshire Furniture Scheme (SSFS) is a social enterprise and charity that distributes recycled furniture into the homes of some of the most excluded members of the community. 100% of funds raised are reinvested into the organisation which runs several community centres, a carpentry workshop and a set of diverse training programmes.

The Meeting of Minds project offers support and training for volunteers with mental health problems. Ecominds funding enabled SSFS to strengthen this support, including offering a mentoring scheme and a programme of focused, accredited work-based training in the areas of warehousing, customer services, team work and communications.

The project enabled participants to increase their confidence, develop transferable skills, and progress into employment or training or become mentors themselves. The funding also contributed to mental health training for staff with the aim of raising their awareness of mental health and increasing their ability to support and empower people with mental health problems.

The project has increased SSFS staff members’ awareness of mental health and provided them with skills to support people who are experiencing mental health problems. Participants have provided positive feedback including improved wellbeing and feeling supported.

What next?
SSFS continues to provide opportunities for people experiencing mental health problems. It works to promote the project and provide ongoing Mental Health First Aid training for carers and professionals in its community centres as well as walking for health, smoking cessation, healthy eating and community garden projects. Ecominds funding has enabled SSFS to acquire the skills to champion mental health awareness, and the charity is now approaching health commissioners for its preventative health work.

The project has informed us, given us confidence in the area of mental health, and allowed us to measure the impact of our work in the preventative field.
(SSFS staff member)

I’ve really enjoyed working with the team on this project. It has made such a difference.
(Meeting of Minds participant)
Bearing Fruit

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Friends of St Nicholas Fields
York, North Yorkshire
01904 411 821
stnicksfields.org.uk
/f/stnicks /@StNicksFields /flickr /groups/stnickscameraclub /youtube /StNicksFields

Friends of St Nicholas Fields – also known as St Nicks – is York’s leading organisation promoting sustainable living. Their Bearing Fruit project provides ecotherapy options at the community orchard within the St Nicholas Fields Local Nature Reserve, York, to people with mental health problems and to the wider community.

The project is run by Friends of St. Nicholas Fields in conjunction with the local Community Recovery Team. Project activities include fruit growing, horticultural training sessions, orchard planting and preparation, building of raised beds, tool maintenance and composting.

There are also opportunities for participants to lead activities. The core group led sessions during a period in 2012 when the project coordinator was on prolonged sick leave. There was another member of staff ready to step in, but by this stage the group was experienced and confident enough to agree their own tasks, prioritise work and welcome new members. A number of volunteers from the core group took on greater responsibility as part of the project with very positive results.

The project has been open to all – from young parent/toddler groups helping out planting wildflowers to student groups planting trees, young people on work experience, international students, and young people with learning and physical difficulties. Members of St Nicholas Fields staff (and many others) help out in their free time.

While Friends of St Nicholas Fields states to new volunteers that the project is funded by Ecominds and involves volunteers with mental health problems, they are not singled out. This creates a positive and inclusive atmosphere. Many participants have been happy to talk about their experiences when they feel comfortable with other people, which has been extremely positive for everyone involved.

What next?

Friends of St Nicholas Fields will continue all of the project activities in a limited capacity after the conclusion of Ecominds funding. Weekly gardening sessions will continue at St Nicholas Fields, Sycamore House, Holgate Allotments and Poppleton Community Railway nurseries.

Gardening sessions will be led by volunteers rather than St Nicholas Fields staff. Recruitment and support of project volunteers will form part of the regular activities of the Volunteer Coordinator, and a reduced project budget (limited to volunteer expenses and project materials) will fall under the yearly volunteer budget at St Nicholas Fields.

User groups will not change and volunteers will continue to be referred by project partners, however there will be a limited number of places available.

I really enjoy it here, I come every week.
I enjoy the gardening work as it is peaceful and I really enjoy being outdoors. (Bearing Fruit participants)

• Friends of St Nicholas Fields has engaged 25 new volunteers with the extension of the Ecominds project.
• Volunteers have carried out 1,300 hours on the project at various locations in the city of York.
• 73% of the volunteers surveyed felt that their mental wellbeing had improved as a direct result of attending the project sessions.
• Feedback about the project has been universally positive, with most volunteers reporting that they feel an improvement to mental and physical wellbeing during project sessions.

73% of the volunteers surveyed felt that their mental wellbeing had improved as a direct result of attending the project sessions.
PRISM Youth Project helps some of Bradford’s most disengaged young people aged between 12 and 21 to improve the quality of their lives. Their PRISM City Farm is a community, environmental and educational project which offers young people the opportunity to manage the day-to-day running of an inner-city farm.

The Breathing Spaces project, based at the city farm, was aimed at young people aged between 14 and 24 with mental health problems. It used ecotherapy to boost individuals’ wellbeing and sense of achievement. It offered opportunities to engage in green exercise, horticulture and a variety of tasks to benefit the farm’s animals and the community. A referral system was developed to enable outside agencies to refer young people to the project. Young people could also self-refer.

The project enabled PRISM Youth Project to employ a volunteer coordinator and a specialist mental health worker to offer one-to-one support, regular supervision, feedback sessions, group work activities, and training opportunities to the young people involved. The public health strategy for England states that teenage years are a crucial time for health and wellbeing in later life, with half of all cases of mental illness (excluding dementia) starting by the age of 14.

By the end of the first year, volunteers had built a chicken run, planned and built a duck pond in the style of a village green, constructed fences, cared for farm animals, grown crops, and cuddled plenty of rabbits.

That first day I came I couldn’t even face getting out of the car. Now look at me, I’ve done a qualification and been offered a job. (Breathing Spaces participant)

This is a lovely place for the kids. You are right in the middle of the city but it’s just so peaceful. (Local member of the community)

Between 2010 and 2012 130 volunteers accessed the project.
64 of these were regular participants and 37 were occasional users.
2 volunteers secured paid work as a direct result of participating in Breathing Spaces.

I’ve always found it really hard to be in crowds of people. It’s still not easy here at the farm but I think I can cope with it now. (Breathing Spaces participant)
NEAT is a small charity supporting out-of-school activities for young people. It has a long tradition of introducing young people to the countryside and enabling them to experience the physical and mental health benefits of outdoor activity.

Their Countryside Champions project creates opportunities for young people who are feeling depressed, anxious, or unhappy with themselves to take part in therapeutic activities in the Yorkshire countryside. Activities include walks, orienteering, multi-day camping trips, creative activities, and opportunities to learn relaxation and stress management techniques.

I didn’t know you could have this much fun. (Countryside Champions participant)

- To date, Countryside Champions has engaged 351 young people.
- 80% of participants are from BME communities.

What next?
Newly acquired funding will enable the project to support young people to take on mentoring and leadership roles. This will contribute to Countryside Champions becoming a sustainable ecotherapy service.
Create to Grow

Nature art and craft

Lead organisation: Artlink Centre for Community Arts

Hull, East Yorkshire

01482 345 104

artlink.uk.net

Artlink Centre for Community Arts develops and delivers a range of community arts activities and events for the people of Hull and The Humber including art exhibitions, outreach projects and training opportunities. Their Create to Grow project provided art and horticulture workshops for residents of a secure mental health unit in Hull. Led by professional artists and horticulturalists, participants transformed their courtyards into green oases. At the end of the project, an exhibition was held at Artlink to celebrate participants’ achievements.

Create to Grow improved the mental health unit’s surroundings and strengthened relationships between residents, who continue to benefit from taking part in garden maintenance.
Enterprise and Outreach

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Second Nature Life Support
Rotherham, South Yorkshire
01709 709 335
winthroppark.com

Second Nature Life Support is a charity providing nature therapy to improve people’s wellbeing and health. At Winthrop Park in Rotherham, they have created a sensory garden from a former derelict and contaminated sewage works. The garden provides people (many of whom have long-term health problems or terminal illness) with a positive focus through ecotherapy, drawing visitors from across South Yorkshire and beyond.

Winthrop Park caters for volunteers of all abilities, providing them with the space and support needed for relaxation, rehabilitation and recovery. Funded by Ecominds and based at Winthrop Park, the Enterprise and Outreach project engaged volunteers in gardening or serving in the site’s Tea Room and Curiosity Shop. Volunteers received support throughout their time on the project, which helps them build confidence and maximise their achievements.

What next?
Over the next three to five years Second Nature Life Support will develop new enterprise ideas that could be implemented either off-site or in their present facilities. They will build a programme of paid activities and outreach initiatives (such as Pilates exercise classes and away days), and secure additional land to expand their operations to cater to a growing demand. The charity also plans to develop its website into an interactive source of support and information for people who are unable to visit Winthrop Park.

When the charity was founded in 2012, Second Nature Life Support anticipated that they would help between 150 and 300 people a year. That same year, the charity helped over 9,600 people from across South Yorkshire and North Derbyshire.

Second Nature Life Support’s volunteer base has grown from a handful to 64 people, and Winthrop Park won the Queens Award for Voluntary Service.

The Ecominds project has enabled us to deliver vital support within our community and changed the lives of hundreds of people in a very positive way.
(David Bowser, Trustee – Second Nature Life Support)

What an inspiring place. It shows what positive thinking can do.
(Visitor to Winthrop Park)
Feel Good Fruits

Social and therapeutic horticulture

Lead organisation: Densholme Community Care Farm

Great Hatfield, East Yorkshire

01964 532 640

tenquiries@densholmefarm-action.co.uk
densholmefarm-action.co.uk

@DensholmeFarm

Densholme Community Care Farm offers respite and rehabilitation through farming activities to people with any health problem, but with a focus on people with mental health problems. The organic farm includes one hectare of native woodland, and one hectare of vegetable production including a large greenhouse, a large medicinal and culinary herb garden, two ponds, pigs, Shetland ponies, sheep and chickens.

The farm’s Feel Good Fruits project engaged volunteers to plant 300 fruit and nut trees. The diversity of the farm allows it to demonstrate sustainable and ecological farming practices and provides an enriching environment for its users. There are various activities to choose from throughout the year and volunteers can also work towards OCN qualifications. The project team is dedicated to making sure that people’s experience on the farm is rewarding.

Some participants attend the farm on a weekly basis, supporting the farm’s regular public events and visits from schools, the elderly and other groups.

I really love coming to this farm.
(James, Feel Good Fruits participant)

An excellent example of how people can benefit from visiting and helping out with farm activities. (Rupert Aker, Soil Association)

What next?
Densholme Community Care Farm plans to continue its work with care management teams and other referral agencies to ensure the farm is accessed by people who are most in need.
York Mind’s Gardening Project supported a group of adults, many of whom recovering from severe and enduring mental health problems, to plan and realise an allotment garden.

Participants took part in gardening activities with the help and guidance of a trained professional, growing vegetables, herbs and fruit. Participants were involved throughout the whole process from planning out the space through to planting, seeding and harvesting.

The group also maintains a plot set up by a local charity that works with children with hearing impairments. Participants help maintain their pond, fruit trees and vegetable patches – their work is appreciated by the children. Helping the community in this way has been extremely beneficial to participants, making them feel valued and motivated.

Sixteen participants engaged in the project. They moved on to be trained as volunteers, enabling them to support new joiners.

I had no idea there were so many things to do in a garden in the autumn. I have learnt a lot about pruning and staking raspberry canes. The allotment is a lovely place to spend time. (Project participant)

What next?
York Mind plans to continue its ecotherapy programme with a green exercise group (a unique service in the local area) that will focus on exercise in green spaces including gardening and walking. The group will be aimed at people experiencing mental health problems, who will be supported into mainstream activities such as voluntary work. York Mind remains an active member of the local Green Network for Health and Wellbeing, partnering with local environmental organisations to promote green wellbeing activities.
Green Steps to Wellbeing

Facilitated green exercise
Lead organisation: Next Steps Mental Health Resource Centre
Norton, North Yorkshire
01653 690 854
nextstepsryedale.co.uk

Next Steps Mental Health Resource Centre supports people with mental health problems in Ryedale, North Yorkshire, by providing a drop-in centre, activities and outreach groups in Helmsley, Kirkbymoorside and Pickering.

Their Green Steps to Wellbeing project has developed environmental activities including a walking group, an outreach group and an allotment team that grows vegetables to supply the Next Steps community café. Next Steps has five allotments, and members are welcome to join the gardening group and spend time helping with the vegetable growing. In 2012 participants grew rhubarb, asparagus, leeks, onions, marrows, and courgettes.

The project has helped reduce the stigma of mental health in the community, trained volunteers and improved community spaces. The walking group is a valuable social activity, giving people the chance to meet and engage with each other informally in a supportive environment.

The group was open, friendly and really inclusive. The combination of exercise and chat made me feel better.
(Green Steps to Wellbeing participant)

What next?
Next Steps is committed to ensuring the project’s future and improving people’s mental wellbeing through outdoor exercise. The centre received further funding from Ecominds under the Supporting Change, Supporting Impact programme to work on a four-year plan for the project. The plan includes improving Next Steps’ support to participants and expanding its collaboration with statutory services.

- 45 people have benefitted directly from the project.
- 4 community organisations collaborated with Next Steps to deliver activities.
- Many participants reported that Green Steps to Wellbeing had a positive impact on their mental health by increasing their physical activity, improving their social skills and heightening their confidence.
- As a result of the project, users said they had confidence to engage in other activities, both within Next Steps and within the local community.
- Some participants went on to engage in further volunteering.
- Some participants moved into paid employment.
Meersbrook Park Walled Garden

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Heeley City Farm
Sheffield, South Yorkshire
0114 2 580 482
heeleyfarm.org.uk

@HeeleyCityFarm
/HeeleyCityFarm
/photos/heelycityfarm

Heeley City Farm is a farm and visitor centre with animals, playgrounds and a garden centre. The farm’s Meersbrook Park Walled Garden site was originally the kitchen garden for Ruskin House, a large mansion that is now the headquarters of Sheffield City Council’s Parks and Countryside team. Within the walled garden, visitors can discover a herb garden, a Japanese garden, an organic vegetable patch, four glasshouses, a composting area, a polytunnel and an orchard with many varieties of apples, pears and soft fruits. The garden also hosts volunteering days and special weekend events, such as Herb Day, Tomato and Chilli Day, and Apple and Pear Day.

Ecominds funding enabled Heeley City Farm to engage a mental health worker to involve people with mental health problems, and other volunteers, in environmental activities in the walled garden and surrounding areas.

What next?
Sessions are held one day a week, all year round. Activities are varied, with a focus on local food growing. The project continues to provide an opportunity for participants to meet new people, learn new skills, get some fresh air and eat tasty food.

I like coming here because of the friendships I’ve made. I’ve also realised how important gardening has been to my overall health.
(Meersbrook Park Walled Garden participant)
Many participants have reported that they highly value the therapeutic qualities of the great outdoors and relish the chance to undertake physical conservation tasks.
The Young Women’s Housing Project (YWHP) is a project for young women aged 16 to 25 who have been affected by sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or domestic violence. Their Nurture by Nature project provides an opportunity for young women and their children to take part in individual and group activities to reduce the stigma associated with mental health problems. The project empowers participants, helping them to improve their physical and mental wellbeing and to develop independent living skills.

Ecominds funding enabled YWHP to employ a project coordinator to support service users, and an allotment maintenance worker to ensure the space is safe and suitable to host a range of activities. Participants engage in a range of therapeutic, educational and creative activities on the YWHP allotment and at indoor venues. Activities include gardening sessions, cook-and-eat workshops, and art-based activities such as scarecrow-making. The project has developed strong relationships with individual volunteers, and with organisations including Veolia, Royal Mail, Sheffield University, and the Department of Work and Pensions’ volunteer scheme Community 10,000. These organisations have provided regular volunteers, allowing the site to develop quickly.

Sheffield Hallam University undertook an independent audit and evaluation of the project and published their findings in April 2013. The report outlines the impact of the project as “overwhelmingly positive, with no negative effects identified”.

Nature by Nurture enabled participants to develop effective coping strategies and independent living skills. Over three quarters of participants have progressed to education, employment or volunteering on other local projects. The project’s ‘in-house resource’ provided an emotionally safe environment to address the young women’s psycho-social and practical needs.

What next?

The Sheffield Hallam University research revealed that the allotment site is the main asset of the project and put forward suggestions to realise its potential as a community resource and to make it financially self-sufficient.

Suggestions included:
- letting out the site to other community groups for a fee
- sharing the allotment with other community groups
- engaging volunteers as caretakers of the site.

In widening the scope of the allotment, its future would be more certain and this would enable the YWHP to continue to embed green activities into its service. It might also open up opportunities to attract further funding streams to develop the site as a community resource while still making it a more attractive resource for the young women and their children.

I always thought gardening was going to be boring, but once I got there I found it really therapeutic – doing all the digging and then picking stuff once it had grown.

My boys and I loved being at the allotment and really enjoyed making the sandpit. I felt great being out in the sunshine and it was so peaceful and relaxing. (Nurture by Nature participants)

My client is a former psychiatric unit in-patient and can be very challenging to work with, but the allotment work has been trouble-free. She sees the allotment as a place where she can be OK.

(Mental health support worker)
Nurturing Natural Talents

Environmental conservation

Lead organisation: Bradford Environmental Action Trust (BEAT)

Bradford, West Yorkshire

01274 487 270

beat.org.uk

BEAT works with individuals, schools, businesses and other organisations to deliver innovative and practical environmental projects that work towards a sustainable future.

Their Nurturing Natural Talents project engages people with mental health problems and other volunteers in conservation activities in Bradford District’s woodland and green spaces. The group meets weekly to take part in practical conservation activities including tree planting, coppicing, dry-stone walling, pond construction, green woodwork, charcoal-making, cleft fencing and making wattle hurdles, as well as some art-based activities.

Ecominds funding enabled BEAT to employ a support worker to provide participants with emotional support and to assess their individual needs and progress. The presence of the support worker ensured that participants had a positive experience on the project. The project aims to reduce the stigma associated with mental health problems by integrating people with mental health problems with other volunteers.

What next?
The Nurturing Natural Talents project will continue into the future, supported by another funding source. It will continue to work with a mixed group of participants, targeting people who are referred from mental health service providers and concentrating on managing woodlands and selling products including firewood and charcoal garden planters. A focus on production will enable the project to become more sustainable and less dependent on support from grants. BEAT also hopes to continue to strengthen its links with Craven Agricultural College, with a view to offering future participants accredited training in environmental conservation.

One of the most worthwhile and enjoyable projects we have ever run. The positive benefits to all involved have been a real eye-opener.

(Ian Butterfield, Nurturing Natural Talent Project Manager)
Orb Green

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: Orb Community Arts
Knaresborough, North Yorkshire
01423 202 028
admin@orb-arts.org
orb-arts.org
/f/obotcommunityarts

Orb Community Arts is a charity and vibrant community centre supporting vulnerable people (especially those with severe and enduring mental health problems) to grow in confidence, learn new skills and play a positive role in their local community.

Ecominds funding enabled Orb Community Arts to support volunteers to turn a plot of disused land near the centre into a working garden. The project enabled people with mental health problems and other volunteers from the community to connect with nature, learn about their environment, and develop new skills in conservation and horticulture. The result – Orb Green – is a natural oasis in the urban space featuring a meeting area, ponds, growing beds and a wildlife conservation area.

The garden provides a green space in which people can take part in therapeutic horticultural activities to grow their own vegetables and develop volunteering and employment skills. The tranquillity of the garden also makes it a good place to relax. Many people now use the Orb Green space to grow food, meet people, and find peace of mind.

The Orb Green project has enabled volunteers to feel better, to learn new skills, and to feel a sense of achievement in having created a healthy, sustainable and inclusive community space. The project has resulted in a positive change in the mental and physical wellbeing of those involved and in the wider community’s perception of mental health.

Things die off in nature and sometimes look a bit lifeless, but then they come back – it puts life into perspective. (Mick, Orb Green participant)

Gardening has helped me in so many ways. I love to see new life from seeds, cuttings or when plants come to life after being dormant. (Orb Green participant)

- 27 people experiencing mental health problems took part in the creation of Orb Green.
- 10 of these gained advanced volunteering skills, taking on mentoring roles and increased responsibility.
- Orb Community Arts employed a gardener with mental health problems for the majority of the project’s duration.
- The project supported 123 people to engage in healthy, outdoor activities with a focus on horticulture, natural habitats, recycling and healthy eating.

What next?
Orb Community Arts is dedicated to maintaining and promoting the garden project as an intrinsic part of the community centre, making it accessible to as many people as possible. The charity has recently secured continuation funding from the Co-operative Membership Community Fund.

Summer 2013 saw an increase in the number of visitors to the garden and Orb Green now has a core team of volunteers tending to the space four days a week, working on landscaping and tending to crops of fruit and vegetables.

For now, the future of the project looks assured and Orb Green can look forward to being a part of the Knaresborough and Harrogate community for many years to come.
Out There

Nature art and craft
Lead organisation: Hive
Bradford, West Yorkshire
01274 598 928
info@hivebradford.org.uk
hivebradford.org.uk | ecooutthere.wordpress.com
@pages/HiveBradford

Hive is a community arts organisation that offers art and craft activities at its centre in Shipley, and in partnership with other community organisations across Bradford. Hive’s Out There project engages people with mental health problems in a programme of creative activities to produce decorative and practical objects to enhance public spaces.

To deliver the project, Hive has worked with several mental health groups across Bradford including ISIS, Mind in Bradford, Sharing Voices, Naye Subbah, Skipton Road Day Centre, HALE, Cottingley Cornerstones, Windhill Community Centre, and with the NHS at The Helios Centre. The project worked with mixed groups of participants to raise awareness of mental health issues.

Ecominds funding enabled Hive to continue group sessions, with a particular emphasis on signposting participants to other activities such as volunteering or returning to work. Hive is now producing printed resource packs for participants, and has established an allotment group whose work will be ongoing. Hive’s drop-in service provides opportunities for people to explore their creative side in an informal and supportive environment.

What next?
Hive continues to offer creative activities to communities across Bradford. Participants have become involved in a number of projects including the Repair Hub (where participants have the opportunity to learn basic DIY and repair skills) and The Fabric of Bradford (a project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund to explore Bradford’s textile industry heritage).
Hive also offers other creative and practical activities such as courses, volunteer-run groups and a drop-in service at the centre in Shipley.

The charity is working towards a new volunteer programme that will support adults with mental health problems to develop self-confidence and skills.

It’s been about developing my whole self and bringing myself back – moving myself on from a bad place and actually enjoying life again. It’s made a big difference.
(Out There participant)
Refugee and Asylum Seeker Project

Social and therapeutic horticulture
Lead organisation: SAGE Greenfingers
Sheffield, South Yorkshire
0114 274 3651
sagesheffield.org.uk

SAGE Greenfingers promotes the mental and physical wellbeing of adults with mental health problems through a programme of creative, therapeutic activities.

The charity’s Refugee and Asylum Seeker Project was based in an area of Sheffield with a high proportion of refugees and asylum seekers. Members of the community have a higher than average probability of being affected by a mental health problem, but are unlikely to receive support or treatment from mainstream services. Ecominds funding enabled SAGE Greenfingers to engage more refugees and asylum seekers in therapeutic horticulture.

The feeling of solidarity and peer support is unique, and the gentle encouragement and insightful presence of the workers, without being over-invasive, has a magical effect in helping these traumatised people open up and move on from the terrible situations they have been through.

( GP with the Asylum Seeker Health Team)

It feels like I have a small family now. I am so grateful for the help and support given to me. Although my future is uncertain, I know I have people around me who I trust, and that is something special.

(Project participant)
**Workcrafts Community Volunteering**

**Nature art and craft**

**Lead organisation: The Workcrafts Company**

York, North Yorkshire

01609 773 696

workcrafts.co.uk

The Workcrafts Company is a charity providing a safe and friendly place where people with mental health problems can improve their confidence and stamina by taking part in practical workplace activities. The charity’s community volunteering programme enables people with mental health problems to participate in community volunteering with a variety of not-for-profit organisations.

Volunteers took part in a range of outdoor activities including repairing footpaths, planting trees and clearing rights of way at North Yorkshire Moors National Park, and renovating one of Wensleydale Railway’s stations. Participants have also volunteered with the North Yorkshire County Council Countryside Volunteers to enhance local footpaths and clear green spaces of non-native vegetation.

The project enables people with mental health problems to get involved in activities they may not have tried without support. The Workcrafts Company helps participants to develop social and working skills, boost their confidence, and mix with the wider community.

**What next?**

Because The Workcrafts Company is confident in the project’s capacity for prevention and for supporting people through the recovery process it has, despite a recent lack of funding, committed to ensuring that the project continues. The charity is working towards securing more funding for the project’s minibus service and to help participants prepare for mainstream volunteering opportunities.

I liked going because it felt worthwhile and I felt useful. (Workcrafts Community Volunteer)

The project has enabled people with mental health problems to contribute to the local community and has provided them with new interests and opportunities. Volunteers reported that one thing they particularly enjoyed was participating with the wider community.
Ecotherapy at local Minds

There is a network of over 160 local Minds across England and Wales. Each local Mind is an independent charity run by local people, for local people. Each is responsible for its own funding and the services it provides, but all are affiliated to Mind.

Local Minds have a long tradition of providing access to ecotherapy. As of autumn 2013, the following local Minds offer some type of ecotherapy that people can use to manage a mental health problem. The wide range of activities offered include allotment gardening, horticultural training, DIY, food growing, cooking, art and craft, walking groups and farming – from vegetable orchestras to surfing!

Use the contact list below to get involved in an ecotherapy activity near you:

**East Midlands**

**Harborough and District Mind**
The Settling Rooms, St Mary’s Place, Market Harborough
Leicestershire LE16 7DR
harbmind@googlemail.com
harboroughmind.org.uk

**Kettering Mind**
49–51 Russell Street, Kettering,
Northamptonshire NN16 0EN
01536 523 216
kettmind@hotmail.com
ketteringmind.org.uk

**Rushden Mind**
6 Alfred Street, Rushden
Northamptonshire NN10 9YS
01933 418 872
info@rushdenmind.com
rushdenmind.com

**Thurrock Mind**
152 Bridge Road, Grays
Essex RM17 6DB
Stepping Stones Manager: 01375 389 780
General enquiries: 01375 391 411
reception@thurrockmind.org.uk
thurrockmind.org.uk

**West Norfolk Mind**
28–28 Blackfriars Street
King’s Lynn, Norfolk PE30 1NN
General enquiries: 01553 776 966
Volunteer Coordinator: 075 8527 9215
headoffice@westnorfolkmind.org.uk
westnorfolkmind.org.uk

**Great Yarmouth and Waveney Mind**
28–31 Deneside, Great Yarmouth
Norfolk NR30 3AX
01493 842 129
reception@gywmind.org.uk
gywmind.org.uk

**Herts Mind Network**

**East London**

**Brent Mind**
Hampton House, 1B Dyne Road
Kilburn, London NW6 7XG
020 7604 5177
info@brentmind.org.uk
brentmind.org.uk

**Bromley Mind**
Anchor House, 5 Station Road
Orpington, Kent BR6 0RZ
01689 811 222
email@bromleymind.org.uk
bromleymind.org.uk

**City and Hackney Mind**
8–10 Tudor Road, Hackney
London E9 7SN
020 8985 4239
services@cityandhackneymind.org.uk
cityandhackneymind.org.uk

**Greenwich Mind**
54 Ormiston Road, Greenwich
London SE10 8LN
020 8853 2395
info@greenwichmind.co.uk
greenwichmind.co.uk

---

**Eastern England**

**Hertford and District Mind**

**Kettering Mind**

**Rushden Mind**

**Thurrock Mind**

**West Norfolk Mind**

**Great Yarmouth and Waveney Mind**

**Herts Mind Network**

**East London**

**Brent Mind**

**Bromley Mind**

**City and Hackney Mind**

**Greenwich Mind**

---

**Norwich and Central Norfolk Mind**

**Southern England**

**South Oxhey**

---

**Eastern England**

**Hertford and District Mind**

---

**Kettering Mind**

---

**Rushden Mind**

---

**Thurrock Mind**

---

**West Norfolk Mind**

---

**Great Yarmouth and Waveney Mind**

---

**Herts Mind Network**

---

**East London**

**Brent Mind**

---

**Bromley Mind**

---

**City and Hackney Mind**

---

**Greenwich Mind**

---

---

---
North East

Darlington Mind
St Hilda’s House, 11 Borough Road
Darlington DL1 1SQ
01325 283 169
contactus@darlingtonmind.com
darlingtonmind.com

Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind
Middlesbrough:
The Mind Centre
96-92 Lothian Road
Middlesbrough TS4 2QX
01642 257 020

Stockton-on-Tees:
Catalyst Building, 27 Yarm Road
Stockton-on-Tees TS18 3NJ
01642 645 655

Jim Woods, Social and Therapist Horticulturalist:
01642 257 834
jim.woods@middlebroughandstocktonmind.org.uk
info@middlebroughandstocktonmind.org.uk

Sunderland Mind
14 Norfolk Street, Sunderland
Tyne and Wear SR1 1EA
0191 657 218 | 075 8672 1438
sunderlandmind@yahoo.co.uk
sunderlandmind.co.uk

Washington Mind
Grasmere Terrace
Columbia, Washington
Tyne and Wear NE38 7LP
0191 178 843
info@washingtonmind.org.uk
washingtonmind.org.uk

Lancashire Mind
Red Apple Nursery
Cobbs Brow Lane
Newburgh, Lancashire WN8 7SF
01257 463 012
General enquiries: 0845 305 4254
chrisashcroft@lancashemind.org.uk
lancashemind.org.uk

Mind in Salford
The Angel Centre, 1 St Philip’s Place
Salford, Manchester M3 5FA

Garden Needs
Radford Street (off Bury New Road)
Salford, Manchester M7 4NT
01617 925 448
General enquiries: 01618 393 030
info@gardenneeds.org.uk
info@mindinsalford.org.uk
mindinsalford.org.uk

Mind in West Cumbria
4–8 Oxford Street, Workington
Cumbria CA14 2AH
0190 066 518
admin@mindinwestcumbria.org.uk
mindinwestcumbria.org.uk

Rochdale and District Mind
The Wellbeing Centre
3–11 Drake Street
Rochdale, Manchester OL16 1RE
01766 752 352
info@rochdalemind.org.uk
rochdalemind.org.uk

Tameside, Oldham and Glossop Mind
Mind Wellbeing Centre
216–218 Katherine Street
Ashton-under-Lyne
Manchester OL6 7AS
01613 369 223
kitchengarden@vgmind.org
togmind.org

Wirral Mind
The Fountain Project
98–92 Chester Street, Birkenhead
Merseyside CH41 5DL
01515 122 280
admin@wirralmind.org.uk
wirralmind.org.uk
### South East

- **Chichester Area Mind**
  - Forum House, Stirling Road, West Sussex PO17 7DN
  - 01243 787 878
  - info@chichestermind.f2s.com
  - chichesterareamind.org.uk

- **Folkestone and District Mind**
  - Mind Resource Centre, 3 Mill Bay, Folkestone CT20 1JS
  - 01303 250 090
  - contact@folkestonemind.org.uk
  - folkestonemind.org.uk

- **Maidstone Mind**
  - 23 College Road, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6YH
  - 01622 692 383
  - info@maidstone-mind.org
  - maidstone-mind.org

- **Milton Keynes Mind**
  - Counselling Centre, Farthing House, 74 Farthing Grove, Netherfield, Milton Keynes MK6 4HH
  - 01908 657 955
  - farthinghouse@mkmind.org.uk
  - mkmind.org.uk

- **Mind in Brighton and Hove**
  - 51 New England Street, Brighton, East Sussex BN1 4GQ
  - 01273 666 950
  - info@mindcharity.co.uk
  - mindcharity.co.uk

- **Sevenoaks Area Mind**
  - Sevenoaks Centre, 34 St John's Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 3LW
  - 01732 744 950
  - admin@sevenoaksareamind.org.uk
  - sevenoaksareamind.org.uk

- **Solent Mind**
  - 28 The Avenue, Southampton, Hampshire SO17 1XN
  - 023 8033 4977
  - info@solentmind.org.uk
  - solentmind.org.uk

- **Worthing and Arun Mind**
  - The Gateway, 8–10 Durrington Lane, Worthing, Sussex BN13 2GG
  - 01903 277 000
  - gardenminders@worryingmind.org
  - worthingmind.org

### South West

- **Bath Mind**
  - 13 Abbey Church Yard, Bath BA1 1LY
  - 01225 316 199 | 01225 396 033
  - greenlinks@bathmind.org.uk
  - bathmind.org.uk

- **Mind in Taunton and West Somerset**
  - The Market Building, Canal Road, Taunton, Somerset TA1 1PN
  - 01823 334 906
  - davidpham@mindtws.org.uk
  - mindtws.org.uk

- **South Somerset Mind**
  - The Markwick Centre, Dampier Street, Yeovil, Somerset BA21 4EN
  - 01935 474 875
  - info@southsomersetmind.co.uk
  - southsomersetmind.co.uk

- **West Cornwall Mind**
  - 3 Race Court, Treswithian Downs, Camborne, Cornwall TR14 0PU
  - 01209 714 550
  - contactus@westcornwallmind.com
  - westcornwallmind.com

### Wales

- **Aberconwy Mind**
  - 3 Trinity Square, Llandudno, Conwy LL30 2PY
  - 01492 879 907
  - info@aberconwymind.co.uk
  - www.aberconwymind.org.uk

- **Cardiff Mind**
  - 166 Newport Road
  - 02920 482 048
  - admin@cardiffmind.org

- **Carmarthen Mind**
  - Priory Centre, 132B Priory Street, Carmarthen, Carmarthenshire SA31 1LR
  - 01267 222 990
  - carmsmind132@aol.com

- **Mind Aberystwyth**
  - The Mill, Riverside Terrace, Mill Street, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 1JB
  - 01970 626 225
  - info@mindaberystwyth.org
  - mindaberystwyth.org

- **Vale of Clwyd Mind**
  - 15 Bedford Street, Rhyl, Denbighshire LL18 1SY
  - 01745 336 787
  - enquiries@valeofclwydmind.org.uk
  - valeofclwydmind.org.uk

### West Midlands

- **Coventry and Warwickshire Mind**
  - Wellington Gardens, Windsor Street, Coventry CV1 3BT
  - 024 7655 2847
  - admin@cumind.org.uk
  - cumind.org.uk

- **Grimsby, Cleethorpes and District Mind**
  - 50 Oole Road, Cleethorpes, North East Lincolnshire DN35 8LR
  - 01472 582 592
  - grimsbyandcleethorpesmind@googlemail.com

- **Shropshire Mind**
  - Suites 3 and 4, Observer House, Shrewsbury SY2 4BL
  - 01743 368 647
  - admin@shropshiremind.org
  - shropshiremind.org

- **Solihull Mind**
  - 14–16 Faulkner Road, Solihull, West Midlands B92 8SY
  - 0121 742 4941 | 0121 743 4237
  - contact@solihullmind.org.uk
  - solihullmind.org.uk

- **Springfield Mind**
  - 185 Drayton Avenue, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire CV37 9LD
  - 01789 298 615
  - enquiries@springfieldmind.org.uk
  - springfieldmind.org.uk

### Yorkshire and The Humber

- **Leeds Mind**
  - Clarence House, 11 Clarence Road, Horsforth, Leeds LS18 4LB
  - 01133 855 889
  - leeds.mind@leedsmind.org.uk
  - www.leedsmind.org.uk

- **Telford Mind**
  - The Wellbeing Centre, 76–83 Severn Walk, Telford, Shropshire TF7 4AS
  - 01952 588 367
  - talk2@telford-mind.co.uk
  - telford-mind.co.uk

- **York Mind**
  - Highcliffe House, Highcliffe Court, York YO30 6BP
  - 01904 643 364
  - office@yorkmind.org.uk
  - yorkmind.org.uk
Eco- did not go ahead. The club continues to run an outdoor adventure programme, and supports young people to achieve The Duke of Edinburgh’s award.