

Green Health

Calling People Back to Health, Back to Balance: The Benefits of Green Spaces and Gardening.



The Bible starts and ends with gardens.

Evidence shows that gardening is highly therapeutic and can bring meaning and belonging to people who suffer from mental ill-health.

We are currently suffering from a mental-health epidemic in society, particularly amongst young people. Loneliness and isolation; cyber bullying; reliance on validation from social media; financial and social pressures; fake news; and a growing sense of apathy and distrust for our modern way of life (many people struggle with a life so disconnected with that of our ancestors). When people cannot find meaning in things, the struggle can lead to mental health problems.

At the Green Health Live 2 conference in June 2019 it was highlighted that whilst 23.8% of all health problems related to mental health, only 10% of the NHS budget is devoted to mental health. A mental health illness can reduce life expectancy by as much as 25 years – this is the same as smoking. The NHS alone cannot deal with these issues; the Church has a key role to play in supporting communities.

Professor Jim McManus, Director of Public Health for Hertfordshire County Council, and President of the Guild of Health and St Raphael explained that Christians were “not called to replicate what psychiatrists and psychologists do”, but “to incarnate a place of human flourishing in our churches”. This could involve “turning the green space at the back of church into somewhere people can go and be quiet”.

Green spaces, whether you are just inhabiting them or creating them, can have a positive psychological impact.

- Gardening gives people a sense of agency - you can express yourself in a garden which gives you a sense of control.
- Green spaces are quiet and undemanding which helps to connect the mind and body.

- Gardening gives a sense of identity and a sense of self. It helps to build self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Gardens can help people to develop relationships with people from the past and present, e.g. with other gardeners, people who give you plants, people from your past (grandparents) who enjoyed gardening.
- Green spaces help people to develop relationships with nature which is really important. Through gardening people can feel like they are giving something back to the world and making a difference. Nature exists without human intervention but gardens need our help to flourish.
- Green spaces are a place of escape - to something or from something. "I can come here and think what I like. If I go elsewhere, I have to fit in" – Anon.
- Gardens are very important to children too. Studies have shown that they can help lower stress and improve mood.

Projects

Look for partner organisations to work with – NHS, mental health charities, schools, councils etc... Are there opportunities for social prescribing?

"we are bringing together people who are not just interested but believe passionately in the issue... it is a fantastic opportunity for the Church and faith groups to really have a positive effect on their local communities."

David Shreeve, Executive Director of the Conservation Foundation, and Environmental Adviser to the Archbishops' Council

For more information on how to promote green health and support both people and wildlife to flourish in your parish, visit the links below. For advice on faculty permissions and grants, please contact the Church Buildings and Pastoral Department.

Links

Church Times: Green Health

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/green-health>

Church of England: advice on creating spaces to encourage and support wildlife

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/biodiversity>

Caring for God's Acre

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/>

Norfolk Wildlife Trust: Churchyard Conservation Scheme

<https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-in-norfolk/churchyards/churchyard-conservation-scheme>