



Feel better outside,
feel better inside:
Ecotherapy for mental wellbeing,
resilience and recovery

Ecominds



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Foreword



Message from Kevin Fenton, Public Health England

Many of us will have found ourselves in a situation where we've put all our energy into something but have

come up against what seems like an insurmountable problem. Nine times out of ten, if we take some time out – maybe to go for a walk in the park – like magic the solution pops into our head.

It's a simplistic analogy, but it's not too dissimilar to the approach advocated in this report. The therapeutic value and wellbeing boost that people get from gardening, growing food, being in and looking after the environment has a strong impact on our physical and mental wellbeing. It helps us to strike a balance as we cope with life's ups and downs.

From the evidence presented by Mind, it's clear that ecotherapy has a role to play in building and supporting our wellbeing and resilience, and keeping us all healthy. There are tangible mental wellbeing benefits from being physically active and ecotherapy seems to do this without the participant even realising it.

It's also clear that it's a service that appeals to a wide range of people – young and old, urban and rural – and is one that can really help engage men, who are often the last in line when it comes to accessing wellbeing and health services.

Ecotherapy services are located within the communities they serve, helping to strengthen local social and community networks for a wide range of people. The activities they provide help people to learn new skills or rediscover those long forgotten – and in some cases give people the confidence or qualifications to get back into work or training.

And the added bonus is that they bring benefits to the local environment as people get involved in the maintenance and conservation of green spaces.

Many people working to improve public health and wellbeing will be familiar with the Five Ways to Wellbeing. It's reassuring to see how an ecotherapy approach enables people to meet all five of these evidence-based actions.

It makes sense for public health teams to help people get involved in activities they enjoy that positively impact on their mental and physical wellbeing.

I'm delighted to support Mind's ecotherapy work. It's another option we can use to help people take control of their own health and wellbeing, and make a positive difference to the communities they live in.

Kevin Fenton
Director of Health and Wellbeing
Public Health England



Executive summary

Ecotherapy is an intervention that improves mental and physical health and wellbeing by supporting people to be active outdoors: doing gardening, food growing or environmental work.

This report provides the people who plan, commission and provide health and social care services with compelling evidence for providing ecotherapy services that can:

- help people look after their mental wellbeing
- support people who may be at risk of developing a mental health problem
- help the recovery of people with existing mental health problems.

Poor mental health is expensive

At least one in four British adults will experience some kind of mental health problem in any one year;ⁱ prescriptions for antidepressants are at record levels in England, with 50 million dispensed in 2012.ⁱⁱ The World Health Organization has predicted that depression will be the second biggest cause of illness worldwide by 2020.ⁱⁱⁱ

Mental health problems place enormous social and economic strains on individuals, their families and communities. For the state there are increased costs and demand for health and social care services and welfare benefits; while tax and national insurance contributions from people who cannot work are also lost.

The cost of mental health problems to the economy in England is estimated to be £105 billion a year:

£21.3b for health and social care

£30.3b lost economic output

£56.6b in human costs^v

Ecotherapy improves mental and physical wellbeing

Ecotherapy improves mental wellbeing and meets outcomes across five government-identified areas for action.^v Ecotherapy uses a life course approach allowing people to develop skills and positive social relationships; it builds strength and resilience with benefits for individuals and the whole community; it develops sustainable, connected communities that challenge

stigma and promote inclusion; it integrates physical and mental health, particularly for groups who are reluctant to increase activity levels; and finally ecotherapy promotes purpose and participation enabling people to build self-esteem and confidence levels.

Ecotherapy also builds resilience levels so people are better able to withstand difficult times and have a supportive community around them. Evidence from Mind's lottery-funded Ecominds scheme identifies ecotherapy as a simple, practical and effective route to put the Five Ways to Wellbeing^{vi} into practice. This set of evidence-based actions includes everyday behaviours that can improve wellbeing: being more active; connecting with other people; taking notice of the world; keep learning, and giving something back.

7 out of 10 people experienced significant increases in mental wellbeing by the time they left the project^{vii}

Ecotherapy is accessible and inclusive

Ecotherapy services have broad appeal and can successfully engage different age groups. Children and young people and older retired people are equally enthusiastic. People with learning disabilities have found ecotherapy to be a valuable route to community participation, which helps them to increase physical activity levels. People with challenging health and social problems, for example homeless people or those with alcohol and drug misuse problems, have found ecotherapy an excellent way to learn new skills whilst enjoying support from peers. Although women find ecotherapy to be acceptable, these programmes have proved to be successful in overcoming the barriers to accessing wellbeing services that men experience. Men, and mental health service users, respond well to the 'leave your diagnosis at the gate' value that many ecotherapy services adopt, where the emphasis is not explicitly on therapy or mental health; however once involved this is a significant feature 'under the surface'.

56% of Ecominds participants were men, while recent IAPT statistics show that men account for only 36% of those attending psychological therapies.^{viii}



Ecotherapy increases and sustains physical activity levels

Some people are intimidated by organised exercise groups, others don't have the social networks or confidence to participate. Ecotherapy can overcome these barriers by enabling people to increase their activity levels at their own pace in a supported environment. Ecotherapy isn't promoted as physical activity but people gradually build up their activity levels as they attend. In this way ecotherapy is effective in raising and sustaining activity levels for people who are reluctant to engage in physical activity.

Ecotherapy is cost effective

Being unemployed is strongly linked with poor mental wellbeing; while people with mental health problems can experience difficulties finding work. Ecominds projects have been successful in helping people move back into employment or training: 245 people found full-time employment and 366 secured part-time work.

Ecotherapy can deliver economic benefits for individuals, their communities and the wider economy. Demand for health and social care services and medication can be reduced, while the costs of paying welfare benefits can also fall. As people attending ecotherapy projects find work they also make tax and national insurance contributions.^{ix}

For five typical Ecominds participants, a study by nef identified savings of £35,413 in one year (£7,082 each) through reduced NHS costs, benefits reductions and increased tax contributions. Using nef's formula, for just one year, we can project savings of £1.46m for the 246 people who found full-time work through Ecominds.^{ix}

Meeting health and social care outcomes

As a holistic, person-centred intervention ecotherapy can achieve multiple outcomes across services including obesity and physical activity levels, the uptake of education and training, pathways to employment; and it enhances the local environment and people's enjoyment of green spaces. Ecotherapy can help to achieve outcomes across the NHS, social care and public health and therefore offers an opportunity for pooling budgets and joint commissioning which would bring wellbeing benefits for local people and cost savings for commissioners.

Making health professionals aware of ecotherapy

Polling shows health professionals have an appetite to find out more about alternative treatments like ecotherapy and would be prepared to refer patients to services if they were available in their areas. The evidence about the benefits of ecotherapy need to be more widely disseminated and made available to GPs. Social prescribing models where GPs prescribe community-based, non-medical interventions should be integrated into care pathways. This will allow GPs to easily provide access to non-medical interventions like ecotherapy while increasing patient choice and strengthening community-based health resources.

36% of GPs would refer their patient to an ecotherapy project if there was one in their area.

44% of GPs wanted to find out more about social prescribing.

46% wanted to find out more about early interventions for people at risk of developing mental health problems.^x

i Mental Health Foundation (2013) *Mental health statistics*. [Online] mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-statistics/

ii HSCIC (2013) *Prescriptions Dispensed in the Community, Statistics for England (2002-2012)*. London: Health and Social Care Information Centre.

iii Murray C and Lopez A (1996) Evidence-based health policy; lessons from the Global Burden of Disease Study. *Science*, Volume 274, Issue 5288, pp. 740-743.

iv Centre for Mental Health (2011) *Economic and Social Costs of Mental Health Problems in 2009/10*. London: Centre for Mental Health.

v HM Government (2010) *Confident Communities, Brighter Futures: A framework for developing wellbeing*. London: HM Government.

vi Thompson S and others (2011) *Five ways to wellbeing. New applications, new ways of thinking*. London: new economics foundation/NHS Federation.

vii Bragg, R and others (2013) *Ecominds effects on mental wellbeing: An evaluation for Mind*. London: Mind

viii HSCIC (2013) *Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Dataset Final Quarter 4 2012/13*. London: Health and Social Care Information Centre.

ix nef (2013) *The Economic Benefits of Ecominds: A case study approach*. London: new economics foundation.

x nfpSynergy (2013) *Primary Healthcare Monitor 2013*. [Unpublished report for Mind].

Summary of recommendations

Health and wellbeing boards

- Facilitate and promote the use of pooled budgets to enable joint commissioning of services like ecotherapy by public health, social care and health teams.
- Use Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) to identify groups, such as older men, who are less likely to engage with traditional mental health or wellbeing services and should be particularly targeted by more accessible services such as ecotherapy.
- Use JSNAs to identify groups, such as people who are unemployed or have physical health conditions, who are at increased risk of developing mental health problems and should be particularly targeted by services such as ecotherapy.
- Identify ecotherapy in Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies as an intervention that can help meet outcomes across public health, social care and health outcomes frameworks.
- Consider the social value of procurement decisions and how these can be used to improve wider economic, social and environmental outcomes for the community when services such as ecotherapy are commissioned.
- Ensure that the views of any Local Nature Partnerships, local voluntary and community sector and patient and service users groups are represented on the board either directly or via engagement mechanisms.

Directors of public health

- Commission ecotherapy services as a practical way of supporting people to take part in activities that promote the Five Ways to Wellbeing, promote good mental health and help to prevent mental health problems.
- Commission accessible wellbeing services such as ecotherapy to help reach groups, identified in the local JSNA, who are less likely to engage with other forms of wellbeing support.
- Work across teams within local authorities to ensure that health and wellbeing is at the centre of all decision-making, particularly regarding access to green spaces.



- Ensure that the positive wellbeing impacts of outdoor activity programmes are measured and understood.
- Support local ecotherapy services to monitor and evaluate their impact, ensuring that services are high quality and effective.

Clinical commissioning groups

- Increase patient choice by ensuring that ecotherapy is available as a treatment that people can choose to help manage a mental health problem.
- Use ecotherapy to raise and sustain physical activity levels of people who do not normally exercise – including people with existing mental health problems who have a higher risk of developing physical health problems.
- Integrate social prescribing models into patient care pathways to strengthen links between health providers and community and voluntary sector organisations that provide services like ecotherapy.
- Support GPs to consider and recognise the value of ecotherapy.
- Ensure that clinical commissioning strategies reflect the needs identified in the local JSNA, including by targeting groups identified as being less likely to engage with other mental health services.

Directors of adult social care

- Ensure that people with care and support needs have the choice to access ecotherapy services as part of their care package.
- Support people with care and support needs to purchase ecotherapy services through their own personal budgets and direct payments where applicable.

Introduction

Ecotherapy is an intervention that improves mental and physical health and wellbeing by supporting people to be active outdoors: doing gardening, food growing or environmental conservation work.

This report shows how ecotherapy is being used to help people maintain good mental wellbeing – and how the same intervention is increasingly being used as treatment to help people recover from a range of mental health problems.

What this report is about

This report:

- outlines how ecotherapy can improve mental and physical health
- describes who benefits from ecotherapy including those who don't traditionally join wellbeing groups, are less likely to access mental health services, may be at higher risk of mental health problems or be socially isolated
- shows how ecotherapy can provide a bridge to employment and training
- details how ecotherapy enhances local environments and green spaces and so benefits the whole community
- provides information on how ecotherapy can meet outcomes for public health teams, clinical commissioning groups and social care teams
- shows how ecotherapy is a flexible and cost-effective option for service commissioners.

Who this report is for

This report aims to inform health and wellbeing boards, public health and social care teams and clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) about ecotherapy and to support the inclusion of ecotherapy within local health and wellbeing strategies and services. It will be of interest to:

Health and wellbeing boards (HWBs) because they have a key role in bringing together a wide range of partners including health, public health, social care, CCGs and community representatives within their local areas. HWBs are responsible for developing Joint Strategic Needs Assessments that focus on current and future health and social care needs in the community, and for producing a joint strategy about how these needs can be best addressed. This will include recommendations for joint commissioning and integrating services provided by partners represented in the HWB.

Public health teams in local authorities because they have a key role in promoting good health and preventing both physical and mental health problems in their local community.

Clinical commissioning groups because together they will lead on the local healthcare system and develop local commissioning plans that will include mental health services.

Social care teams because of their responsibilities to enhance quality of life for people with care and support needs, including a new outcome for 2013/14 to reduce social isolation.

Local service providers including community and voluntary organisations, social enterprises and local statutory services who may be considering developing local ecotherapy services.





Mental health

"Mental health is everyone's business - individuals, families, employers, educators and communities all need to play their part. Good mental health and resilience are fundamental to our physical health, our relationships, our education, our training, our work and to achieving our potential."

No Health Without Mental Health: a cross-government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages. (2011) HM Government/Department of Health

The evidence for ecotherapy

The evidence for the impact of the ecotherapy approaches presented in this report is drawn from Mind's five-year Ecominds scheme, which supported 130 ecotherapy projects in England. This includes:

- an independent evaluation by the University of Essex, School of Biological Sciences and Essex Sustainability Institute¹
- research on the economic benefits of Ecominds projects by the new economics foundation (nef)²
- independent evaluations of more than 25 individual ecotherapy projects
- a national evaluation of the Big Lottery Fund's £160 million Wellbeing and Changing Spaces programmes,³ which included some Ecominds projects.
- a survey of General Practitioners (GPs), nurses and CCG professionals about their awareness and use of charity services.⁴

About Ecominds

Mind funded 130 ecotherapy projects across England with £7.5 million support from the Big Lottery Fund. From 2009 to 2013 over 12,000 people from all walks of life used Ecominds to look after their mental health by getting active outdoors in nature spaces. Supported by trained professionals they did gardening, food growing or environmental conservation work. They found it improved their mental and physical wellbeing as well as helped them be more physically active and meet people, get more involved in their local community, learn new skills and develop new interests.

At least one in four adults in Britain will experience some kind of mental health problem in any year.⁵

Depression affects people of all ages and genders. One in five people aged over 16 years will experience depression or anxiety⁶ and 25 per cent of older adults require an intervention to treat it.⁷ The World Health Organization has predicted that it will be the second biggest cause of illness by 2020.⁸ Prescriptions for antidepressants are rising every year; in England topping the 50 million mark for the first time in 2012.⁹



Some groups within the population are likely to be at higher risk of mental health problems and may find it hard to access support if they do. In particular, there is evidence that people with long-term physical health conditions, pregnant women or new mothers who are socially isolated, people who are unemployed or in poor housing, and older people, may be at greater risk,¹⁰ with over a third of people using specialist mental health services aged over 65.¹¹

People from Black and minority ethnic groups are also more likely to experience a mental health problem, and are less likely to get access to the appropriate support than people from white communities;¹² the prevalence of depression is thought to be 60 per cent higher in these groups.

Children and young people who are looked after or care leavers have higher rates of mental health problems than their peers who are not looked after,¹³ and so do children who have experienced neglect and abuse.

Men generally are less likely to seek help for any health problem including mental health until quite late. Men account for 75 per cent of all suicides, a figure that has not changed for over 10 years.¹⁴

Other groups who have a higher risk of mental health problems and lower wellbeing include people:

- with learning disabilities
- with no qualifications
- who are lesbian, gay or transgender
- who are deaf or hard of hearing
- who have problems with alcohol and substance misuse
- who are in prisons.¹⁵

The costs of mental health

Mental health problems carry a cost to the individual of not just poor health but often loss of employment and missed educational and training opportunities that impact on earnings and economic wellbeing. For the state, mental health problems place increased demand and costs on health and social care services and welfare benefits; and the state loses tax and national insurance contributions from people who cannot work.

The cost of mental health problems to the economy in England is estimated to be £105 billion a year.¹⁶ This includes £21.3 billion in health and social care costs and £30.3 billion in lost economic output, and £56.3 billion in human suffering.

Mental health problems are responsible for 23 per cent of the burden of disease in England compared to 16 per cent for cardiovascular disease and 16 per cent for cancer.¹⁷

By 2026, the number of people in England who experience a mental health problem is projected to increase by 14 per cent, from 8.65 million in 2007 to 9.88 million, even before the impact of the current economic climate is taken into account.¹⁸

Despite this, in 2010/11 the NHS spent only 11 per cent of its annual budget on mental health services¹⁹ and the most recent estimate showed that, before the responsibility for public health was transferred to local authorities in April 2013, only 0.05 per cent of the annual NHS adult mental health budget had been spent on the promotion of good mental health and the prevention of mental health problems.²⁰



Mental wellbeing

Department of Health guidance and the cross-government framework for wellbeing published in 2010 has defined wellbeing as “A positive state of mind and body, feeling safe and able to cope, with a sense of connection with people, communities and the wider environment.”²¹

It recommends promoting mental health and wellbeing across the whole population because:

“Mental health and well-being can positively affect almost every area of a person's life: education, employment, family and relationships. It can help people achieve their potential, realise their ambitions, cope with adversity, work productively and contribute to their community and society.”

This government framework identified five key areas for action to promote wellbeing. Ecotherapy works across all of these domains offering a holistic service to promote wellbeing in the community.

Table 1 - Public mental health framework and ecotherapy

Five areas for action	What ecotherapy offers
Use a life course approach to ensure a positive start in life and healthy adult and older years. With such an approach, people develop and share skills to continue learning and have positive social relationships throughout life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages learning and skills development. • Everyone can take part, with age-appropriate groups and activities that can be adapted for all needs and abilities. • Particularly benefits older men.
Build strength, safety and resilience: address inequalities and ensure safety and security at individual, relationship, community and environmental levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes place in nurturing, safe, and non-judgmental environments. • Builds personal resilience and social networks. • Facilitated by trained staff. • Benefits the whole community through improving green spaces.
Develop sustainable, connected communities: create socially inclusive communities that promote social networks and environmental engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces social isolation and increases connections between people and across communities. • Challenges stigma and promotes inclusion. • Promotes the use of green spaces.
Integrate physical and mental health: develop a holistic view of wellbeing that encompasses both physical and mental health, reduce health-risk behaviour and promote physical activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves both physical and mental health including physical activity levels. • Supports people to change health-risk behaviour and promotes healthy lifestyles
Promote purpose and participation to enhance positive wellbeing through a balance of physical and mental activity, relaxation, generating a positive outlook, creativity and purposeful community activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers purposeful activity that benefits the community and the individual.

Resilience

"Resilience is the capacity of people to confront and cope with life's challenges; to maintain their wellbeing in the face of adversity."²²

A recent report by Mind and The Mental Health Foundation²³ identifies three key components of an effective strategy to promote resilience and recommends that public health teams should plan to ensure access to services, such as ecotherapy, that prioritise building resilience and preventing mental health problems.

Table 2 - Resilience and ecotherapy

Components of an effective resilience strategy	How ecotherapy builds resilience
<p>Activities that promote wellbeing</p> <p>Wellbeing is about people feeling good and functioning well.</p>	<p>Ecotherapy supports people to take part in activities that promote each of the Five Ways to Wellbeing.²⁴ There is also good evidence that being outdoors in a green environment is strongly associated with improvements in wellbeing.²⁵</p>
<p>Support to build social connections</p> <p>A core component of social capital is good social connections. These connections are one of the biggest determinants of wellbeing and good mental health.²⁶</p>	<p>Ecotherapy tackles isolation and loneliness, builds peer support networks, increases people's sense of belonging to their local community and helps people back into work and training.²⁷</p>
<p>Support to develop psychological coping strategies</p> <p>Cognitive and behavioural therapies and psychological education are evidenced-based ways of improving people's coping strategies.</p>	<p>Psychological treatments are increasingly used to prevent mental health problems particularly during times of stress or change.</p> <p>Ecotherapy helps people to feel more positive about their life.</p> <p>People report that ecotherapy helps them relax and feel less stressed.</p> <p>Some ecotherapy projects include psychological support alongside therapeutic activities and can be offered alongside other treatments.</p>



Ecotherapy offers everyone a way to protect their mental health so that they are resilient enough to withstand difficult times and have a supportive community around them. Ecotherapy services contribute to stronger, more resilient communities and build social capital.

Five Ways to Wellbeing

The new economics foundation's Five Ways to Wellbeing²⁸ are evidence-based steps that we can all take to improve our mental wellbeing. Ecotherapy offers an easy and practical route to put these into practice.

The Five Ways to Wellbeing arose out of a UK Foresight Project²⁹ that examined research on mental wellbeing through life and how to develop this for the benefit of everyone. Wellbeing is seen to be about feeling good and functioning well and the 'Five Ways' messages suggest practical actions that people can take every day which evidence tells us will improve their wellbeing.

Evidence from Ecominds shows that ecotherapy offers an easy and practical route to putting these five actions into practice. The University of Essex evaluation³⁰ of Ecominds found that people using ecotherapy have:

- been more **Active** by taking part in exercise and activities in natural environments – gaining the physical and mental health benefits
- **Connected** both with other people and the wider community thus increasing social inclusion
- started to **Take Notice** of nature and the green spaces around them – gaining the associated mental health benefits and increasing connectedness to nature
- managed to **Keep Learning** – both developing new skills and learning about themselves; and
- been able to **Give** - through sharing and supporting each other and working as a team.

Connect with others

I was a recluse for 10 years and felt completely socially isolated. I can socially engage with people at my own pace. The volunteering tasks let me work alone, on a bad day, or in group when I have more confidence.

Participant at Garden Needs, Salford

Be more active

I wouldn't have dreamed I would enjoy gardening, but the way it is presented here is both relaxing and good physical exercise, and I feel good after I've been.

Participant at The Orchard Shed, Margate

Take notice of the world

You start to notice things again like the changing of the seasons.

Participant at Growing Well, Cumbria

Keep learning

I've learnt about waterways and wildlife, met huge amounts of interesting people and made many friends.

Participant at Thames 21, London

Give to others

I've been helping for a couple of months and I find it really rewarding... it gets me out of the house... you know you've done something positive... it makes you feel good... for me it's win win.

Participant at Core Landscape Social Enterprise Nursery, London

Ecotherapy explained

Ecotherapy is an intervention that improves mental and physical health and wellbeing by supporting people to be active outdoors: doing gardening, food growing or environmental conservation work.

Ecotherapy is sometimes called 'green care' or 'green exercise'; and the language around ecotherapy is evolving as research and interest in it develops. A growing body of evidence shows that taking part in activities like gardening, food growing and conservation work in natural environments has measurable and positive impacts on people's wellbeing.³¹ Research is indicating consistent results about the benefits of taking part in environmental and conservation activities.³²

What is ecotherapy?

Ecotherapy is more than going for a walk in the park or mowing the lawn in the garden. It is a regular activity that is:

- facilitated and structured
- focuses on doing an activity rather than 'health'
- takes place in a green environment
- is related to exploring and appreciating the natural world
- happens over time
- involves contact with other people.

Ecotherapy can improve everyone's health and wellbeing. Its flexibility means that services can meet a variety of needs: as a wellbeing service that can help everyone look after their mental health; as an early intervention service targeting people at higher risk of mental health problems, and also as services to support recovery for people with existing mental health problems.

Ecotherapy services offer activities in natural environments in rural and urban locations. They are often provided by local community and voluntary organisations, others are connected with mental health services including local Minds or NHS services, and some are provided or hosted by national environmental organisations.

Ecotherapy services funded by Ecominds typically fall into five categories or types of activity, and some offer a mix of activities:

Social and therapeutic horticulture

Projects improve wellbeing by supporting people to spend time in gardens and allotments, take part in gardening activities from digging to planting seeds and growing fruit and vegetables to eat. Activities can be adapted to suit the needs of many people. Projects usually have a mix of trained staff who have mental health and horticultural experience. They provide planned activities with staff supporting people to get involved and build a sense of a group working together.

Environmental conservation

Projects focus on protecting the environment, for example by managing woodland or restoring a wildlife habitat. They aim to improve the environment and improve the wellbeing of the participants through the action of a group of volunteers. Structured activities are managed and run by the projects and people work in a team of volunteers. These projects can offer more of a physical challenge but can be easily adapted to meet most people's needs.

Nature art and craft

Projects that provide art and craft activities that take place in a natural environment and may use natural materials such as clay, wood or leaves to produce an artwork. Some projects focus on creative activities and others include it as part of a range of activities – for example flower-arranging or basket-weaving groups within a social and therapeutic horticulture project or care farm.

Facilitated green exercise

These projects use physical activity such as walking groups or cycling groups in a natural environment. Green exercise is facilitated and led by an instructor. People say they feel physically fitter and feel uplifted by being out in the open and close to nature. Some people have been more motivated to maintain the physical activity because they enjoy it and it happens in a social group.

Care farming

Projects are based on working farms and offer a structured and supervised activity to a range of groups of people in order to benefit their physical and mental health. People like the hands-on nature of the activity, which can include animal care, crop growing, use of machinery and management of land. Care farms can be found both in the countryside and in urban areas.



Case study

York House Community Gardens, Stony Stratford, Milton Keynes

York House Community Gardens developed from the local Mind group in Milton Keynes working with York House Community Centre to clear overgrown land and develop allotment-style plots for community groups and people using Mind's services. Led by a volunteer project manager, nine community groups such as Headway (for people with brain injuries) and the Women's Institute developed allotments alongside the Mind group.

Mind's gardening group is supported by a garden supervisor who is also a mental health worker. A thriving community of groups and individuals has formed around the allotments with joint events and the Mind group helping others to tame their plots. Now a community orchard is being planted and a commercial food growing social enterprise is underway to offer training, work experience and employment to vulnerable people.

People using the Mind gardening group have grown in confidence and become more sociable as they have worked together on their plot and met other people from other allotment groups. Previously the groups had little contact. Friendships have established and continued outside of the gardens. People say they feel useful and involved.

I like the other people and how friendly it is. I feel I'm cared about

Participant York House, Mind gardening group

The garden supervisor is an experienced mental health worker who can offer more support when necessary - the result is that people with mental health problems have somewhere to go where they feel comfortable, safe and included. People say they like coming because it is something 'normal' and doesn't feel like a mental health group.

At the start we thought it would just make the gardens nicer but it's been much more than that. We have new people coming into the centre, the groups interact much more and know each other, and people want to get involved. It has brought the people who use York House together.

York House Community Gardens
Project Coordinator



How ecotherapy works

There is no one model for ecotherapy. So long as it includes the principles of structured and facilitated activity taking place regularly outdoors with people interacting with each other and having time to experience nature and the surroundings – it is ecotherapy. This combination enables people to achieve a remarkable number of outcomes – not all at once but gradually over time and the benefits seem to be sustained and the community benefits too.

Table 3 - What people say they get from ecotherapy³³

What ecotherapy does	When people take part in ecotherapy they...
<p>Increases levels of physical activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets people moving in an enjoyable way • Raises awareness about the benefits of being active • Improves physical and mental health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • get out in the open air regularly and become more active • can take part regardless of their fitness level • manage their weight better • increase their flexibility and stamina • manage physical conditions better • feel better as endorphins 'feel good' hormones are released
<p>Increases wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieves the Five Ways to Wellbeing • Improves mood • Increases self-confidence and motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make friends and value social contact • do an enjoyable and worthwhile activity • say they 'feel better' and more relaxed • are more positive about their life • learn a new skill or develop an interest • feel valued – what they do makes a difference
<p>Improves mental health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds resilience • Improves everyday functioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • get time out from stresses and problems • feel less depressed or anxious • sleep better • can talk about problems if they want to • get support from others with similar experiences • manage their mental health problems better • use other treatments as well
<p>Increases social inclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces social isolation • Develops social skills • Reduces stigma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make friends and value social contact • feel accepted and 'normal' • get involved in the community • have a routine and a regular place to go • get support from others with similar experiences • realise mental health problems can happen to everyone
<p>Adds social value</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds social capital • Supports return to work and education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • do something useful in their community • get interested in what is happening in their community • gradually build up skills • see the impact of their actions and that change is possible • begin to be more hopeful about the future • gain qualifications and work experience • get a job, education or training - for some
<p>Connects with nature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harnesses the benefits of being outside in green environment • Improves local environment • Increases positive environmental behaviours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enjoy being outside experiencing nature and green spaces • feel calmer and more peaceful • get interested in growth and change • meet others interested in nature and widen social contacts • feel part of the world - a spiritual dimension for some • do something to look after the environment

Case study

Growing Well

Growing Well in Cumbria is a social enterprise growing organic produce for sale. People recovering from mental health problems are supported to take part in activities from planting and tending seeds to harvesting crops and running the business. A 2012 independent evaluation³⁴ found that 76 per cent of participants showed an increase in wellbeing at some point during their involvement with Growing Well.

What happens at Growing Well

Participants choose a regular day to attend and after an introductory session they work in small teams and have a choice of tasks. Lunch is an important part of the day and helps people get to know each other. All participants have a monthly supervision session with a staff member to review progress and set new goals. Vocational training is available and people can complete diplomas in work-based horticulture.

The staff team have expertise and training in mental health, which means they are attuned to people's mental health even though the focus of the project is not medical in any way. Staff can recognise if a person is becoming unwell and may suggest making a GP appointment or with the person's permission arrange appointments for them. The result is that people get help early and crises can be avoided.



Referrals and participants

Strong relationships have been formed with local GPs who refer 50 per cent of people and others are referred from social care or mental health services. The project has been successful in working with men aged over 40 who can be hard to engage in mental health services.

An independent evaluation identified six factors that had a positive impact on participants:

- **opportunities for social interaction**
- **a routine and structure** with something regular to do each week
- **people felt better about themselves**
- **the flexibility of the project** supported people to stay involved
- **training was available** and was a stepping stone to training and employment
- **contact with nature** was relaxing and people were more physically active.

Participants complete a Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale questionnaire each month, the project evaluation showed that 76 per cent of people showed improvement in wellbeing at some time.

The project is in a rural location so it has been important to fund people's travel costs as transport difficulties have prevented some people continuing to take part.

A blog and videos share more insights about participants' experiences at growingwell.co.uk



50% of people are referred by GPs and others are referred by social care and mental health services

Who ecotherapy is for

Over 12,000 people across the country used Ecominds to look after their mental and physical health by getting involved in ecotherapy services.

Ecotherapy services are for everyone and offer a range of activities that are accessible to all. People like the fact that they are community based and anyone can join, and that services were 'normal' activities and not branded as mental health services. Many ecotherapy services have been surprised at how local communities have valued what they are doing, got involved and supported them.

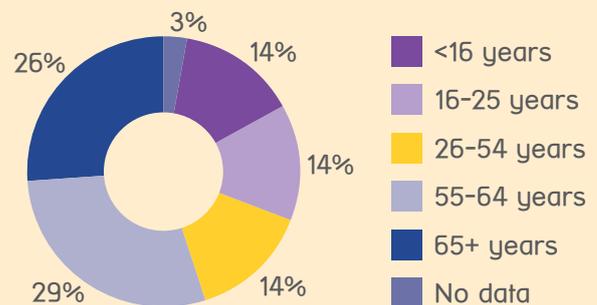
Ecominds services were used by more men than women – 56 per cent of participants were male and 44 per cent female – and 55 per cent of people were aged over 55 years.

Ecotherapy services have attracted and engaged a range of different population groups including groups known to be at a higher risk of developing mental health problems and groups who traditionally don't join social or support groups or seek help for mental health problems.

Older people

While having a mental health problem does not necessarily occur with aging it is a time when life events linked to depression are more likely to happen such as poor health, retirement and bereavements, loneliness and social isolation. Older people enjoy ecotherapy services as they help them get out and meet people in their community, make friends, be more active and get involved in community life.

Ages of Ecominds participants



Case study

Older people and ecotherapy - Bob's story

Before experiencing a long-term illness Bob was an avid and accomplished canoeist. His life had been changed by his illness and although responding to treatment he found he lacked any meaningful activity or motivation to join new activities. Being retired also meant he had no routine or daily structure.

Bob joined the Growing4Life conservation project at The Vyne National Trust estate in Hampshire. The project worked with people who were in the recovery phase of their treatment or who needed support to prevent conditions worsening. Most people were referred by GPs, community mental health teams or voluntary services. Bob participated in weekly sessions where a Growing4Life project officer supported a team of volunteers. Work included rhododendron control, removal of sycamore saplings, path clearance and other tasks to make the woodlands more accessible for visitors and to improve biodiversity. Bob began to recover his confidence and motivation to continue with other activities.



Bob said of his participation:

I particularly enjoyed rhododendron removal and the review sessions as it has given me the opportunity to talk to Carl [Project officer] about the project and other areas of life. It has really boosted my confidence and motivation and has given me the confidence to join other projects and courses. I now volunteer at an allotment project, do a Walk for Health group and attend a course at Basingstoke College of Technology.

Bob has also taken up canoeing again.

Growing4Life is an Ecominds project run by Thrive in Berkshire, Hampshire and South Oxfordshire for people aged 55 and over.

Men talked about being more relaxed and finding they could open up to others about their problems



Men and wellbeing services

Traditionally men are less likely to come forward for help with mental health problems. Men are more likely than women to take their own life,³⁵ more likely than women to be admitted to hospital under the Mental Health Act following prison or court action;³⁶ and less likely to use psychological therapies than women.³⁷

A recent report³⁸ identified five barriers to men's engagement in social projects:

- men are more resistant to seeking help
- men may fear stigma about problems and see having a problem as 'unmanly'
- men are not visible in support services, social groups etc – men are not there as beneficiaries or staff
- some groups have not traditionally been reached by support services, particularly young men and Black and minority ethnic men
- many projects don't look at things from a male point of view.

Ecotherapy projects have successfully overcome these barriers, attracting and retaining large numbers of men, which is highly unusual for health and wellbeing projects. A key success factor in attracting men seems to be that the projects invited people to take part in green activities, be more active and to get outside rather than asking them to join a health and wellbeing group. This suggests that ecotherapy is an effective way to reach out to men to promote their wellbeing and prevent mental health problems, and to support recovery for men living with mental health problems.

Some Ecominds projects thought that men were more interested in activities such as allotment gardening or conservation because these activities are more socially acceptable for men to take part in. Others thought that men were more likely to accept a referral to a gardening or green-related community project than a mental health project, which by definition implied they had a mental health problem. Men reported more than just the benefits of being more physically active – they talked about being more relaxed and finding they could open up to others about their problems while they worked. Men liked that it is not a 'talking therapy' and is never presented as one; yet once involved found themselves talking and feeling better for it.

Men formed 56% of Ecominds participants and as a majority of all participants were aged over 55 it is reasonable to assume that ecotherapy services attracted significant numbers of men in the older age groups. In some projects the percentage of men taking part was even higher, for example at Go Wild, Stay Well, a conservation project in Taunton, 82% of participants were men.

Black and minority ethnic groups

People from Black and minority ethnic groups experience higher rates of mental health problems than white communities.³⁹ People are interested in green activities and spending time in natural environments, regardless of their ethnic or cultural background. Ecotherapy services that are sensitive to cultural issues can increase attendance, for example one Ecominds project ran women-only sessions, which increased attendance by Muslim women.

Children and young people aged under 16

Children and young people who used Ecominds were enthusiastic about ecotherapy. They relished the opportunity to get close to the natural world and found the activities fun and interesting. Ten per cent of Ecominds ecotherapy projects were exclusively for children and young people such as Surf to Success in Cornwall where 8 to 16 year olds with challenging behaviour or at risk of mental health problems have been learning to surf, and Avon Tyrell Eco Health project where young people with mental health problems became volunteers on 12-week environmental projects.

As half of all lifetime cases of diagnosable mental health problems begin by age 14 and three-quarters begin by the person's mid-twenties,⁴⁰ early adulthood it is an important time to focus on improving mental health and wellbeing.

People with learning disabilities

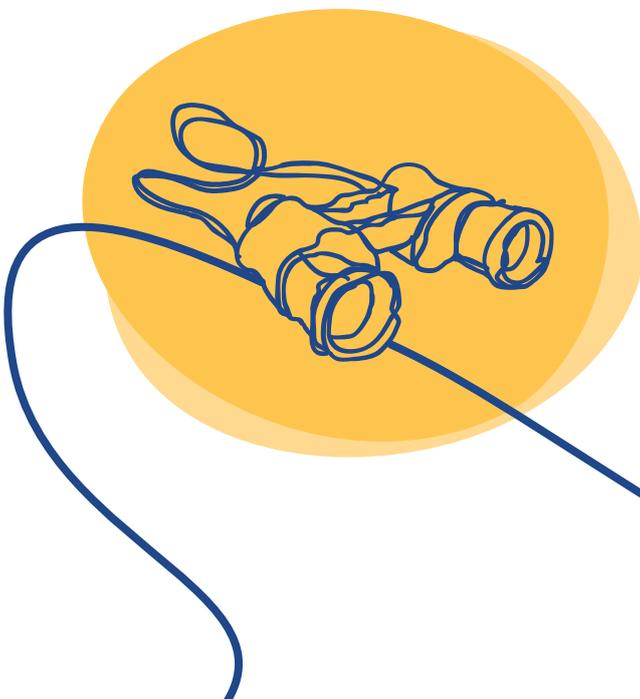
People with learning disabilities are often socially isolated and may have fewer opportunities to get involved in community life or meet people where they live. They also have a higher risk than the general population of developing a mental health problem.⁴¹ Ecotherapy services have proved to be a valuable route for people with learning disabilities to be part of their community, take part in a meaningful activity that makes a difference, and be more physically active.

Mental health service users

People who use mental health services made up 54 per cent of Ecominds participants. Participants were experiencing mental health problems ranging from mild depression and anxiety through to more severe and enduring conditions such as schizophrenia. People said they felt included and part of a community group; they found this satisfying and gained the confidence and desire to be sociable and interact with other people. Ecotherapy offers a unique way for people with mental health problems to improve their physical and mental health, and manage their condition. For many people it was used alongside another treatment such as medication and was part of their recovery plan.

People with challenging health and social problems

People living with challenging health and social problems such as being homeless or living in temporary accommodation, being long-term unemployed, living alone with no family or support, having alcohol or substance misuse problems or living in prisons and mental health hospitals - often experience the worst physical and mental health and are often the most excluded. Ecotherapy services have been remarkably successful in gaining the trust and commitment of people who do not engage with other health, social care or community services. Part of this success seems to be that people are not asked to join a health project but rather a practical activity that may help others and where they may learn something new.



People drop in as they wish and gradually increase their involvement



Case study

Putting Down Roots

Putting Down Roots is a social and therapeutic horticulture project for homeless people with mental health problems based in London and run by the charity St Mungo's. It offers gardening activities, horticultural training and one-to-one support for people who have experienced homelessness. According to an evaluation in 2012, the project had the potential to impact positively on people's recovery⁴² and 37 per cent of participants gained qualifications and/or moved on to education, employment or volunteering.

A gardener trainer works with participants on each garden site, setting a programme of work tailored to the space available, time of year and, most importantly, to the needs of the participants. He gives everyone an induction, providing informal support during sessions and feeds back to the participants' key workers on their progress. People drop in as they wish and gradually increase their involvement; this informality works well for those people who lack confidence or find it hard to make a regular commitment.

St Mungo's works with people who have a range of complex needs including a history of sleeping rough, mental health problems, problems with substance misuse and low levels of literacy and educational attainment. Putting Down Roots participants will be at varying stages in their recovery, some living in hostels while others are preparing to move into independent living. So far:

- 32 people gained Open College Network/Level 1 horticultural qualifications
- 11 others completed the course work
- 27 people went on to volunteering, education or employment.

I've learned loads. I've learned how to categorise plants, I've learned how to tell the difference between weeds, how to use tools safely, how to treat different plants among other things.

Putting Down Roots participant

The impact of ecotherapy

Ecotherapy had a significant impact on over 12,000 people who took part in Ecominds projects improving physical and mental health and wellbeing.

The University of Essex Evaluation of the Ecominds programme⁴³ and over 25 individual ecotherapy project evaluations found that people who took part in Ecominds projects had:

Measurable improvements in mental wellbeing

Seven out of ten people experienced significant increases in wellbeing by the time they left the project. The type of project people got involved in didn't seem to make any difference, nor did their age. The only difference noted was that women tended to start with better mood scores than men.

Increased social inclusion

At the start of an ecotherapy project many people said they did not feel part of their community but by the end most said they did. The longer people were involved the more strongly they rated their neighbourhood belonging. Individual project evaluations found that people said making friends and meeting people had been very important for them with friendships and support continuing outside the project.

Healthier lifestyles

The longer people were involved in a project the healthier they said they felt; even after one session people reported feeling better. People were asked how important taking part in exercise was for them and by the end of an Ecominds project over 50 per cent said it had become more important for them. Individual project evaluations reported that people had increased energy levels, were more physically active and felt fitter, and many said they slept better and had more interest in taking care of themselves.



More interest in healthy eating for some

The University of Essex in depth study of nine Ecominds projects found that more people agreed at the end of the project than at the beginning that they enjoyed putting more effort and care into the food they ate. Individual ecotherapy projects that focused on growing and cooking food found that people were more interested in healthy eating after their involvement.

More connected with the natural world

Over 50 per cent of people said they felt more connected to nature and highly rated the importance of being outside in nature at the end of their Ecominds project. Individual project evaluations showed that people thought this was one of the most important parts of the projects. Older people were slightly more likely to report this outcome than younger people.

Adopted environmentally friendly behaviours

Many people were already engaged in and aware of environmentally friendly behaviour. After being involved in an Ecominds project, people were more likely to recycle glass, paper and metal and their previous environmentally friendly behaviours were strengthened.

Encouraging regular physical activity

The benefits of physical activity for physical health are well known and the Department of Health recommends adults should do two and a half hours a week of moderate intensity activity – which makes people feel warm and breathe harder – plus activity that improves muscle strength on at least two days a week.⁴⁴

Engaging in regular physical activity is linked to improving mental health especially for people experiencing mild to moderate depression. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends regular physical exercise for people with mild to moderate depression to support better sleep and structured programmes of group physical activity as a treatment.⁴⁵

People with mental health problems are also more likely to experience physical health problems. They are at a higher risk of being overweight or obese;⁴⁶ they are twice as likely to die from coronary heart disease as the general population, and are four times more likely to die from respiratory disease.^{47 48}

The challenge for health professionals and public health teams is how to ensure that people do engage in physical activity and enjoy it enough to continue to do it regularly. Ecotherapy offers an acceptable way for people to gradually increase their levels of physical activity and to experience the 'feel good' factors associated with being more active.

Being able to take part at their own pace and gradually build up their strength and fitness was valued by many and especially those with disabilities and/or lower levels of fitness – anyone can take part in ecotherapy.

Many people are put off by group exercise classes or organised physical activity fearing they will not know anyone, not be fit enough to keep up, or haven't got the right clothing or equipment. Ecotherapy gets around all of these fears as it is not presented as being about physical activity, however as people get involved they become more active and more aware of the benefits of being active.

I definitely got healthier and I've taken up running since I joined the project.

Participant at Branching Out, Bromley, London

I didn't think I would like the walk as I get really nervous when I'm outside but I felt safe and talking with Jim [the support worker] and the other walkers took my mind off worrying. After the walk me and my husband decided to walk home rather than get a taxi.

Participant at Out and About, Middlesbrough and Stockton

As people get involved they become more active and more aware of the benefits of being active



Ecotherapy reduces social isolation

Ecotherapy helps people to meet others and make friends especially in their local community, building up personal support networks, and most importantly helping people to enjoy and look forward to social contact. Social isolation is linked to poor wellbeing and higher risks of mental health problems. People who have been unemployed for a long time, or who have mental health problems, can lose contact with friends and people around them. Others who can experience social isolation and loneliness include people who are retired, live alone or are bereaved.

A recent report about public health's contribution to building resilient communities recommends that targeted interventions are needed to support the most isolated people who are not accessing other services.⁴⁹

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'm 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.

Participant, Roots Gardening Service, Bournemouth

I feel very lonely in my flat, with no one to talk to, and no friends. I feel very isolated since my husband died. I have no garden so it's lovely to spend time outside with Stroud Valley, growing veg again like I used to. Getting plenty of fresh air and exercise helps me sleep better and feel more optimistic.

Participant, Stroud Valley Project

Measuring success

One of the strengths of ecotherapy is that it provides participants with multiple wellbeing outcomes. Traditional measures of success in healthcare do not acknowledge the holistic effect of multi-faceted interventions like ecotherapy.

Many Ecominds projects, and the independent evaluation of the scheme by the University of Essex, used the internationally recognised Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) to measure impact. This measure has also been used in the Health Survey for England and is cited in the cross government mental health strategy as a well-evidenced measure for adult mental health.⁵⁰ The newly produced guidance on measuring wellbeing provides a useful overview of using WEMWBS.⁵¹

Agreeing on a standardised outcome indicator for mental wellbeing will help community-based providers and commissioners:

- develop a baseline of information that can be used to track changes in people's feelings and experiences over the course of the intervention
- reveal those aspects of people's lives that people are dissatisfied with to fine tune wellbeing interventions
- better understand different components of wellbeing among particular groups which can help tailor community-led interventions.



The economic case for ecotherapy

Ecotherapy is a low cost intervention that has many economic benefits for individuals, their community and the wider economy.

Ecotherapy interventions have delivered a range of economic benefits for participants, their communities and the wider economy. Ecotherapy:

- provides a preventive service that has been shown to improve mental and physical health and wellbeing, reducing demand for more acute (and expensive) health and social care services
- reduces commissioning costs by offering a single service that can support those at higher risk of mental health problems and those with existing mental health problems

- offers a pathway to employment, education and training especially for those who have been unemployed for a long time or have other challenging life circumstances, reducing welfare and benefits costs and increasing tax revenue
- can enable funding to be secured from other sources to support health and social care outcomes
- enhances and protects the local environment and green spaces at relatively low cost to the local authority
- adds value to the local community by supporting the voluntary and community sector and social enterprises to deliver ecotherapy.

Ecotherapy services are relatively inexpensive to deliver as most are building on existing services. They are often delivered by partnerships between organisations and groups with expertise in mental health and green services, making the most of shared resources. Many ecotherapy projects have developed unique partnerships to deliver their services and because the activity is so inclusive it widens the range of groups, organisations and businesses who are willing to get involved. The examples on page 25 demonstrate how some ecotherapy projects have been funded.



Prism City Farm, Bradford

Breathing Spaces is a young people’s project at Prism City Farm in Bradford. It provided opportunities for 100 young people with mental health problems aged between 14 and 24 to volunteer to develop new areas of the farm. Two members of staff were employed – a volunteer coordinator and a mental health worker who trained and supported the young volunteers. It is estimated that it cost £1136 to support each young volunteer – over 100 volunteers received some training, 28 took part in accredited training for example in land and sustainability, and three went on to employment related to their activity at the farm.

Core Landscapes, London

Core Landscapes in east London has set up a plant nursery on vacant land leased from the council at a peppercorn rent. The nursery is a social enterprise and supports local volunteers to gain skills, work experience and training opportunities. Local businesses contributed funds, volunteers and gifts in kind totalling £200k in the project’s first 18 months. Core Landscape estimates that £10k will fund an on-site volunteer and training coordinator for six months. The nursery is used by many community groups who come to enjoy the nursery and grow. Up to 10 people a week are trained and supported to be volunteers. In the first 18 months three volunteers went on to gain employment.

Pathways to employment, education and training

Being out of work is strongly linked with poor mental health and wellbeing. People with mental health problems can find it very hard to get back into work. Ecotherapy services helped people gain valuable employability skills such as timekeeping and team work and practice communication skills and most importantly become motivated. Some services also offered support and helped people find work experience placements, write CVs and complete application forms and got them job interviews with businesses they were associated with.

That was the first thing I’d done in years and years where I learned something and got a piece of paper for it [tractor training]. It meant so much.

Participant at Growing Well, Cumbria

Having a bike has enabled me to break my isolation. Thanks to my increased self-esteem and physical wellbeing I am now looking for work after two years off sick!

Participant at Bike Minded, Bristol

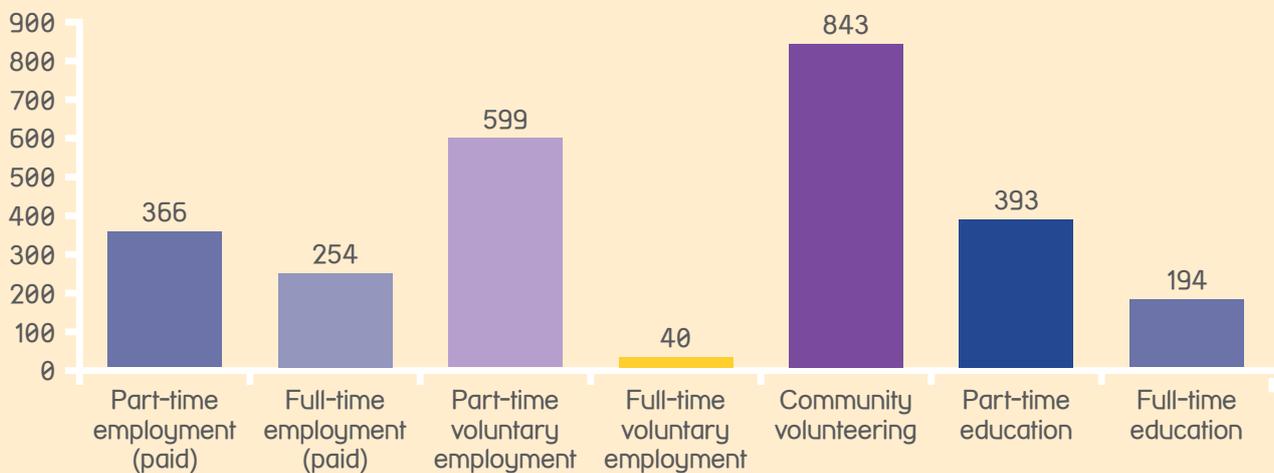


Table 4 - Participants in Ecominds projects who went on to employment, education or volunteering



60% of participants have gone on to employment, education or training

Case study

Growing Skills supports people into employment and training



Growing Skills offers a horticultural training course and work experience with commercial 'green' businesses. The 13-week course runs four days a week; with one day of classroom-based training and three days of voluntary work at community projects. This can include park maintenance, tree planting, creating gardens, and learning to use equipment. Participants work towards achieving a City & Guilds Level 1 certificate in work-based horticulture. The course includes job search support and accessing local services for help with literacy, numeracy, IT skills and advice on benefits and housing.

Many participants have been long-term unemployed, are recovering from alcohol or substance misuse, have learning disabilities, mental health problems and/or have been homeless. Most are referred by local mental health services, drug and alcohol services or job centres.

85 per cent of participants have gained full or part qualifications and 50 per cent have gone on to employment, education or training. For some people this has been life-changing, helping them to move to independent living and full-time employment. Participants make new friends while working together in small teams and these friendships endure giving people vital peer support.

A man in his 40s who completed the course went on to gain full-time employment in a green business. He had been having problems with alcohol and drug misuse for many years, experienced hallucinations and hearing voices but found that working outdoors dramatically improved his mental health:

The practical side of gardening is great for mental health problems, it has really helped me. I still have the odd day where I 'disappear' but this is getting much less frequent. It is great to be able to take out any frustration in the soil, when digging holes and concentrating on hard physical work.

Building partnerships with local authorities and housing associations and green businesses has resulted in work experience placements where the participants needs are understood and they get extra support to help them succeed. Following work placements and volunteering these organisations have later taken them on as employees.

Growing Skills is run by Trees for Cities which works to enhance urban spaces.

Reducing welfare costs and demand on services

The Ecominds evaluation included an analysis of the economic benefits of ecotherapy by the new economics foundation (nef) for five typically representative people taking part in different projects.⁵² It identified three kinds of economic benefits for the state:

- a reduction in **direct** costs – for example reduced use of NHS mental health services, reduced prescription costs
- a reduction in **indirect** costs – for example avoiding paying job seekers allowance, personal independence allowance (previously disabled living allowance)
- increased **revenue** – for example from tax and national insurance contributions.

For the five representative individuals studied, in one year alone, savings of £35,413 were identified through reduced health care costs and increased tax and national insurance contributions – the average yearly savings per person equals £7,082.

Using nef's formula, it's also possible to predict savings to the state of £1.46m in one year just from reduced welfare benefits and fresh tax receipts alone for the 254 people helped into full-time employment through Ecominds. As this figure was calculated using legal minimum wage levels, and does not include any of the direct cost savings from reduced use of medication, health and social care services, total savings are likely to be far higher.

It is also worth noting that 366 people found part-time employment, and that many of the 12,071 Ecominds participants will have seen reductions in their medication, health and social care needs as a result of their ecotherapy sessions.

It was clear from the case studies that ecotherapy interventions that helped people into employment had the greatest economic benefits for the state. As Joanne's story shows below there are other benefits to the person who takes part, for example living independently, being discharged from mental health services and planning their future.

Joanne's story

The following extract is from a detailed case study and economic analysis of the Ecominds scheme carried out by nef.⁵³

About Joanne

Joanne was in her early twenties in 2010 when she was referred to Growing Well in Cumbria. She was being treated by the Early Intervention in Psychosis team with weekly community psychiatric nurse appointments following a long stay in hospital. She was overweight and unfit, rurally isolated and inactive. She slept during the day and spent the night playing on the computer. She became ill in her late teens and never had a job.



What Joanne did at Growing Well

Joanne began doing farm-based activities one day a week. Working in a small team she built up her confidence to work with others and socialise with people. She found that she enjoyed farming. In her meetings with the staff she began to think about the future, and expressed interest in attending more often, and a year later was attending four days a week.

Joanne learned to drive a tractor, gained a tractor driving qualification and a certificate in horticulture. She began to think about farming as a career. Joanne's health improved. She lost weight, became fitter, and was discharged from mental health services.

Continued >

Joanne's story continued

Gaining employment

Growing Well staff signposted Joanne to jobs and educational opportunities. She undertook some temporary paid work with Growing Well as a horticultural assistant, working independently from staff. When a local horticultural apprentice opportunity came up Joanne was supported to complete her CV and undertake some interview practice.

Joanne applied for the apprenticeship and was taken on. As a new entrant to farming she needed more commercial experience so Growing Well supported her to find a work-placement. Two years after joining Growing Well she began her apprenticeship and a year later has moved house, is in paid employment and has passed her driving test.

Table 5 - Summary of annual economic benefits from Growing Well for Joanne

Growing Well estimate that it costs £45 per day to support a person.			
Most people will start doing one day a week and build this up to two or three days a week.			
Joanne's support totalled £5,400 over the year that resulted in a cost-benefit equalling £7,399.63.			
Savings and contributions over one year	Value (£)	Support provided	Cost (£)
Avoided prescription costs	258.27	Attending 1 day per week for 12 weeks	540.00
Avoided medical consultation costs	408.92	Attending 2 days per week for 12 weeks	1080.00
Avoided community nurse costs	6,968.00	Attending 3 days per week for 12 weeks	1620.00
Avoided Jobseeker's Allowance	2,953.60	Attending 4 days per week for 12 weeks	2160.00
Avoided disability allowance	1,092.00		
Increased tax contribution	572.90		
Increased NI contribution	545.94		
TOTAL	12,799.63		5,400.00

Economic outcomes

Following Joanne's recovery the potential benefits and avoided costs of the intervention to the state and broader public sector are the following:

- avoided prescription costs
- avoided medical consultation costs
- avoided use of community psychiatric nurse services
- avoided benefits payments as a consequence of moving into employment
- avoided Disability Living Allowance costs
- increased tax receipt to the Exchequer as a consequence of moving into employment
- National Insurance contributions as a consequence of moving into employment.



Ecotherapy adds social value

The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires public authorities such as the NHS or local authorities to consider how a service may improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of an area and all services commissioned by public authorities to demonstrate social value. One aim of the act was to support community groups, voluntary organisations and social enterprises to win more public service contracts. It is hoped that the act will help to improve services because they are designed with social value in mind. Public authorities can also be held to account if social value has not been considered.

Ecominds projects have demonstrated a range of social value contributions such as:

- employing local people with mental health problems and providing volunteering, work experience and training opportunities in a supportive environment
- improving local green spaces, making them safer and pleasant for people to use

- improving people's recycling behaviour
- increasing people's awareness of conservation and the local environment
- providing support to groups such as older people who may be lonely and isolated, helping them make friends and contacts in the community
- helping people to access other community services especially for people who are socially excluded
- increasing people's awareness of how to look after their physical and mental health
- supporting people to join community activities and feel part of their community
- reducing stigma about mental health and raising awareness about mental health in the community.

The case study about Grounded Ecotherapy below demonstrates how an ecotherapy provider has added social value to their service, and is also on the way to becoming a self-sustaining enterprise.

Case study

How ecotherapy adds social value

Grounded Ecotherapy, run by Providence Row Housing Association in the east end of London, works with homeless people who have drug, alcohol and mental health problems. They work in groups to create and maintain green spaces and have built wildlife gardens in schools, installed and maintained gardens in hostels. They work in close partnership with the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park.

Volunteers are referred by drug and alcohol services, and mental health services in Tower Hamlets. All volunteers are trained in basic horticulture and some go on to take formal qualifications. Over 40 volunteers have joined the project - twice as many men as women - and participate regularly each week. The gardening is very physical as volunteers plant trees, build ponds and lay paths as well as plant wildflower gardens.

Grounded Ecotherapy has gone from strength to strength, with calls for its services from older people's services and local schools unable to build or maintain gardens themselves. They now have contracts to maintain four biodiversity parks in Tower Hamlets,

do green maintenance with housing associations, and a five-year contract to maintain a roof garden at the Southbank Centre on the Thames which they built with the Eden Project. Grounded Ecotherapy now needs more staff and has employed two long-term volunteers, and is about to employ another; other volunteers have gone on to gain employment elsewhere and turn their lives around. Working in schools and public places like parks has helped people feel part of the community, and that they are making a contribution. It has also challenged stigma about mental health.

Going gardening gets me out of my flat and gives me something to do with the day.

Participant, Grounded Ecotherapy

Watch Grounded Ecotherapy build the rooftop garden here: [youtube.com/watch?v=D9n36P29mi8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9n36P29mi8) or visit their Facebook page by searching for Grounded Ecotherapy Facebook



Making it happen

Ecotherapy offers a different approach to health and wellbeing which has proved to be highly acceptable to local communities across the country and which is both preventive and supports people with existing mental health problems. It can also offer opportunities to meet outcomes that are shared across services and offer people more choice about how to promote health and wellbeing.

Health and wellbeing boards

Ecotherapy can help to achieve outcomes across the NHS, social care and public health

The 2011 cross government strategy *No Health Without Mental Health*⁵⁴ aims to 'mainstream mental health'. It identifies the need to promote wellbeing and improve mental health as well as treat mental health problems. The strategy sets out a vision for the outcomes it wishes to achieve:

- more people will have good mental health
- more people with mental health problems will recover
- more people with mental health problems will have good physical health
- more people will have a positive experience of care and support
- fewer people will suffer avoidable harm
- fewer people will experience stigma and discrimination.



HWBs must address these aims in their Joint Strategic Health and Wellbeing Strategies and commission effective services to deliver these outcomes, as well as meeting the needs set out in their Joint Strategic Needs Assessments.

Ecotherapy has proved to have an effective preventive role – improving people's wellbeing and building resilience. It is successful in reaching people who rarely get involved in social or support groups and who may be at higher risk of mental health problems and lower wellbeing.

Ecotherapy adds social value because the intervention takes place in the community, often delivered by community and voluntary groups or social enterprises. It builds partnerships across communities and provides opportunities for participants to contribute to the community as well as improve their own health and wellbeing.

Its holistic approach can target multiple outcomes across services including obesity and physical activity levels, the uptake of education and training, pathways to employment; and enhance the local environment and people's enjoyment and use of green spaces.

Local Nature Partnerships

The government's natural environment white paper established a network of Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) to work strategically to improve a range of benefits we get from a healthy natural environment.

The white paper acknowledges the positive effect of spending time in nature and that it is a significant determinant of health. It states that LNPs and HWBs should:

- actively seek to engage each other in their work, and
- have reciprocal representation on each partnership.

Source: HM Government (2011) *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*. London: HM Government.

We know HWBs face a number of challenges as they take up their new role and begin to identify priorities in their communities. Ecotherapy can offer solutions to these:



Table 6 - Ecotherapy solutions to challenges facing HWBs

Challenges for HWBs	What ecotherapy can offer
<p>Mental health is not a static concept and people have a range of mental health needs across a lifetime.</p>	<p>Ecotherapy supports people with a range of mental health needs by improving wellbeing for all through to supporting people with severe mental health problems.</p>
<p>Greater focus is needed on preventive and universal services but constrained resources are increasingly focused on specialist services.</p>	<p>Ecotherapy is community based and open to all.</p> <p>Its partnership approach makes it suitable for jointly commissioned approaches and pooled budgets. It can enable resources from other sources such as social enterprises, businesses, housing providers and the voluntary sector to support projects, and can support some projects to become self-sustaining.</p> <p>Ecotherapy is relatively low cost and offers a good way to meet shared outcomes across health, social care and public health. It is preventative so can stop people needing more expensive health and social care.</p>
<p>Sedentary behaviour, obesity and conditions related to these are rising.</p>	<p>Ecotherapy increases physical activity levels and interest in healthy lifestyles. It can successfully target groups who don't exercise or join social activities such as older men and women.</p>
<p>Personalisation of services and personal budgets are increasing to give people more choice.</p>	<p>Ecotherapy provides a flexible service that can be tailored to individual needs. Ecotherapy is already being used as part of care and support plans.</p>
<p>The prevalence of mental health problems is increasing.</p>	<p>Ecotherapy offers a community based way for people to improve their mental health and resilience.</p> <p>Ecotherapy is acceptable to people who don't use support services or seek help with mental health problems but who are at higher risk of mental health problems.</p>
<p>People are living longer, resulting in higher levels of social isolation and physical health conditions associated with age.</p>	<p>Ecotherapy appeals to all age groups, including older people – 55 per cent of participants were aged over 55 years.</p> <p>Ecotherapy is a good way to tackle social isolation and helps people make friends and get involved in the community.</p> <p>Ecotherapy activities help people become more active; and improve fitness among people who are less mobile, unfit or don't normally exercise.</p>
<p>The Social Value Act (2012) means that health and wellbeing boards must ensure that procurement of public services improves the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of local people.</p>	<p>Ecotherapy strengthens social enterprises and other local providers to meet local needs, which in turn supports local economies, and provides pathways to employment for some people.</p> <p>Ecotherapy adds social value with wider benefits such as people feeling part of the community and taking part in community life.</p> <p>The local environment benefits from ecotherapy interventions.</p>

67% of people made fewer trips to their GP as a result of their participation.

Source: Evaluation of Bike Minded, Bristol



Joint commissioning

Joint commissioning of services presents members of HWBs with the opportunity to find new and effective solutions to deliver their priorities including services that can deliver on more than one outcome across health, public health and social care while reducing costs. Department of Health guidance for HWBs encourages “integrated working between health and social care commissioners, and... appropriate support to encourage partnership arrangements for health and social care services, such as pooled budgets, lead commissioning, or integrated provision.”⁵⁵

The tables in Appendix 1 show how multiple outcomes across NHS, public health, and adult social care can be met through community-based ecotherapy services.

Commissioning local providers such as charities and social enterprises can help to build community assets and capacity so that these organisations are better equipped to deliver future health and wellbeing services.

These organisations often have expert knowledge about the type of services needed by the communities they work with. Many have long-established networks and are highly trusted, which ensures their services are accessible and inclusive.

Recommendations for health and wellbeing boards

- Facilitate and promote the use of pooled budgets to enable joint commissioning of services like ecotherapy by public health, social care and health teams.
- Use Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) to identify groups, such as older men, who are less likely to engage with traditional mental health or wellbeing services and should be particularly targeted by more accessible services such as ecotherapy.
- Use JSNAs to identify groups, such as people who are unemployed or have physical health conditions, who are at increased risk of developing mental health problems and should be particularly targeted by services such as ecotherapy.
- Identify ecotherapy in Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies as an intervention that can help meet outcomes across public health, social care and health outcomes frameworks.
- Consider the social value of procurement decisions and how these can be used to improve wider economic, social and environmental outcomes for the community when services such as ecotherapy are commissioned.
- Ensure that the views of any Local Nature Partnerships, local voluntary and community sector and patient and service users groups are represented on the board either directly or via engagement mechanisms.

Public health teams

Ecotherapy helps people improve their mental and physical health, and wellbeing. It tackles the wider determinants of health, increases people's resilience and improves health outcomes.

The *Public Health Outcomes Framework for England, 2013-16*,⁵⁶ identifies two high-level domains to be addressed:

- increased healthy life expectancy, and
- reduced differences in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy between communities.

And four broad objectives:

- improvements against wider factors that affect health and wellbeing, and health inequalities
- people are helped to live healthy lifestyles, make healthy choices and reduce health inequalities
- the population's health is protected from major incidents and other threats, while reducing 'health inequalities
- reduced numbers of people living with preventable ill health and people dying prematurely, while reducing the gap between communities.

Ecotherapy can contribute to achieving all of these objectives and the table in Appendix 1 lists this in more detail.

Increasingly we know how to promote wellbeing; we also know the risk factors associated with mental health problems and can identify circumstances that can put good mental health at risk as well as the barriers to people accessing wellbeing support.⁵⁷ Ecotherapy has been successful in reaching people at higher risk of mental health problems, such as people who have been unemployed for a long time, are isolated, homeless, or have long term health problems. It also successfully engages groups, such as men, who traditionally don't use services that promote wellbeing.

Public health teams are in a position to lead on joint-working and joint-commissioning for mental health improvement and wellbeing. By developing community-based ecotherapy services there is the potential to target those most in need of health improvement in effective, cost effective and accessible ways. Public health teams should also support local ecotherapy services to monitor and evaluate their health improvement and wellbeing impact, to ensure that services are effective and of high quality.





Case study

The ELM project on the Isle of Wight

A successful ecotherapy project for vulnerable children and young people providing 12-week courses has led to a similar project being commissioned for adults by public health on the Isle of Wight.

Eco for Life Mentoring (ELM) has worked with 250 children and young people aged between 12 and 19. They were referred by statutory services such as schools, pupil referral units, and youth offending teams because the children or young people have been excluded from school or at risk of it, or have problems with behaviour at school or at home.

The structured 12-week course uses experiential learning to introduce the group to the natural world and includes activities such as bat hunting, bug workshops, and building wildlife friendly gardens – they also have a lot of fun and make friends.

The participants develop personal and social skills as well as an awareness of ecological issues and are supported by trained volunteer mentors. Completing the course means qualified 'eco warriors' can get involved in other eco events and projects and they can gain the John Muir Environmental Award or ASDAN qualifications. Parents say that behaviour improves dramatically and schools are surprised that children and young people have got immersed in the course and demonstrated that they can learn.

The ELM programme for adults will see five courses for groups of 10 people who have been referred by substance misuse services and learning disabilities services. It will follow a similar programme as the children's course. Depending on feedback it may be adapted further for adults.

ELM has been developed and run by
The Hampton Trust

Recommendations for directors of public health

- Commission ecotherapy services as a practical way of supporting people to take part in activities that promote the Five Ways to Wellbeing, promote good mental health and help to prevent mental health problems.
- Commission accessible wellbeing services like ecotherapy to help reach groups, identified in the local JSNA, who are less likely to engage with other forms of wellbeing support.
- Work across teams within local authorities to ensure that health and wellbeing is at the centre of all decision making, particularly regarding access to green spaces.
- Ensure that the positive wellbeing impacts of outdoor activity programmes are measured and understood.
- Support local ecotherapy services to monitor and evaluate their impact, ensuring that services are effective and of high quality.



Social care services

Ecotherapy can be a positive intervention for people using social care that promotes their physical and mental wellbeing and meets other social care outcomes including reducing the need for care and increasing social contact.

The 2010 government strategy *A vision for adult social care: Capable communities and active citizens* emphasised the need for more personalised, preventive services that are focused on delivering the best outcomes for people using social care. It introduced the three year Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework⁵⁸ aligning social care, NHS, and public health outcomes and a number of joint and complementary outcomes across services. A key focus is on the quality of care and outcomes over four domains:

- enhancing the quality of life for people with care and support needs
- delaying and reducing the need for care and support
- ensuring people have a positive experience of care and support
- safeguarding adults whose circumstances make them vulnerable and protecting them from avoidable harm.

Ecotherapy can contribute to achieving all of these outcomes and the table in Appendix 1 lists this in more detail.

Ecotherapy has been particularly successful in reducing social isolation which many people using social care experience – a new focus on tackling social isolation was set out in the government's white paper on care and support⁵⁹ plus a new social care outcome on isolation⁶⁰ will be measuring people's satisfaction with their level of social contact. Ecotherapy has helped people join community activities, meet others and make friends, take part in worthwhile activities and feel part of the community.

Ecotherapy can also help to meet people's other care and support needs, for example maintaining involvement in education, employment and learning activities or sustaining relationships and support systems.

Personalisation and personal budgets

Personalisation of services, and the use of personal health budgets so that people can choose their own care, is increasing. Within the Ecominds programme people with mental health problems or the physically disabled have used personal budgets to buy ecotherapy services as part of care and support plans. Ecotherapy services can be flexible and be shaped around a person's individual needs. It is this flexibility that people have often commented on positively, for example being able to stop and start their involvement, dropping out when they are unwell or when family commitments change but being able to return later and being able to choose the activities they do.



Recommendations for directors of adult social care

- Ensure that people with care and support needs have the choice to access ecotherapy services as part of their care package.
- Support people with care and support needs to purchase ecotherapy services through their own personal budgets and direct payments where applicable.

Clinical commissioning groups

Ecotherapy is increasingly being used by GPs as a mental health treatment in its own right. It provides another choice for people and can be used alongside other treatments, and it engages people who traditionally don't seek help for mental health problems such as men.

Ecotherapy offers a choice of treatment for depression

Depression is one of the most common mental health problems in the country. The NICE guideline⁶¹ on depression and anxiety in adults recommends psychological therapies (talking therapies) or medication or a combination of both. However many people don't want to take antidepressants and psychological treatments are not easily accessible or acceptable to everyone.

Although the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme is making a difference there are still waiting lists and some people are only able to access short interventions. Far fewer men take up talking therapies than women; the most recent statistics show that 36.2 per cent of those attending IAPT were men – whilst 56 per cent of those attending Ecominds services were men.⁶²

The NICE guideline⁶³ notes that central to depression 'is depressed mood and/or loss of pleasure in most activities'. Most ecotherapy participants report finding pleasure and enjoyment in their chosen green activity and being outdoors in natural surroundings. Three in five people with mental health problems felt more positive about their lives by the time they left an ecotherapy project.



It improves my depression, helps me be more motivated and gives me satisfaction in doing things.

Participant at Spring to Life, Totnes, Devon

Others have talked about how taking part in physical activity outdoors makes them feel better, look after themselves and sleep well – all things that can be hard when you have depression:

You go home and you can't help but nurture yourself. You go home and you have a hot bath and you have something nice and hot to eat, you get an early night with a hot water bottle and you're looking after yourself because you're knackered, but it's good for you.

Participant, Growing Well, Cumbria

Many ecotherapy participants found the peer support from others in their ecotherapy group to be helpful and valued having someone to talk to who had a similar experience. It helped people to recognise that anyone can have a mental health problem and challenged some of the stigma about mental health. Men often commented that they had begun to talk about their mental health problems with others – often other men – and were surprised to find that they could offer support as well as receive it.

Ecominds impact on mental wellbeing for people attending an ecotherapy project:

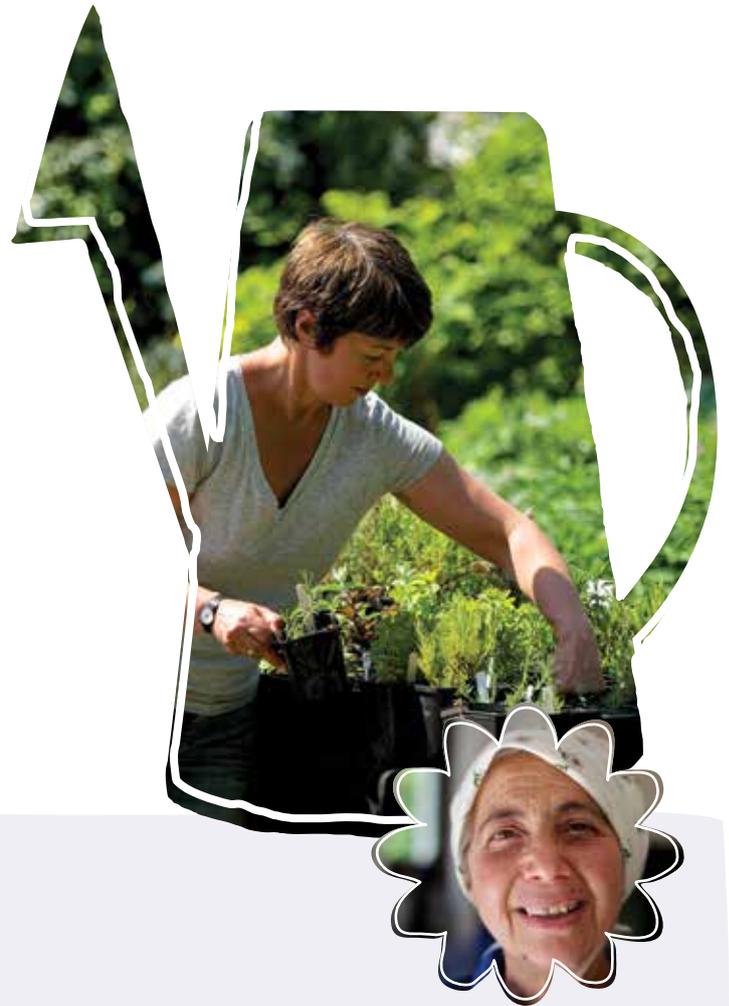
- seven in 10 (69%) experienced significant increases in wellbeing
- three in five (62%) experienced improvements in self esteem, and
- almost eight in 10 (76%) experienced mood improvements.

Ecotherapy and social prescribing

Some ecotherapy services use a social prescribing model where a GP or health practitioner prescribes an ecotherapy intervention for their patient.

Social prescribing is a way of linking patients with non-medical interventions within the community, usually from a referral by primary care services. Social prescribing can strengthen provision for people with mental health problems by widening the choice of services that improve a range of health and social outcomes.

Some Ecominds projects developed partnerships with GPs and mental health services and worked closely with them to support their patients and two projects took part in local trials of social prescribing.



Case study

PoLLeN and social prescribing

PoLLeN is a social and therapeutic horticulture project that works closely with a GP practice and health centre, co-located at the Bromley by Bow Healthy Living Centre in Tower Hamlets.

The GP practice and Healthy Living Centre see PoLLeN as one of a range of treatments that can be prescribed. All new and all trainee GPs spend time at PoLLeN, and GPs and health staff pop in. The project is part of a social prescribing pilot across Tower Hamlets.

People are referred by their GPs and health professionals because they are experiencing stress, anxiety, panic attacks, agitation, low mood, lack of self esteem or confidence, poor motivation or difficulty in coping with day-to-day life. The project has been successful in attracting white British men and people from the Bengali community. The Project Coordinator has experienced depression herself and is a mental health nurse as well as a gardener. A part-time gardening tutor also works on the project.

At the heart of PoLLeN is a regular, weekly horticulture session that all new participants join. The project provides a gentle introduction to gardening for people living with mental health problems who may be isolated and rarely leave home. Participants can go at their own pace, talk or not, work alone or with someone else, and for some just coming to the session is a big step. People may have neglected their physical health too: being part of the healthy living centre helps people find out about and access health services such as weight management and diabetes clinics.

The GP Mental Health Lead described the project:

I see PoLLeN as a 'group therapy' but most importantly it does not look like group therapy and does not expect or demand verbal participation. It therefore allows true reflection through giving its clients the space and time (and company) to make this happen more naturally and safely.

Making GPs aware of ecotherapy

Research by the Mental Health Foundation found that 78% of GPs had prescribed an antidepressant in the previous three years, despite believing that an alternative treatment might have been more appropriate.⁶⁴ In a follow up study, 70% of GPs said they would use more social prescribing (for example, exercise referral, self-help groups) for common mental health problems if they had the option.⁶⁵

Recent polling of GP and CCG professionals on the behalf of Mind has identified that they consider ecotherapy to be a valid and suitable treatment for common mental health problems such as anxiety (52 per cent) and depression (51 per cent). GPs are also interested in finding out more about ecotherapy and in having ecotherapy services available in their area

for their patients – 36 per cent said they would refer people to ecotherapy services but there were none in their area, and 56 per cent wanted to know more about the evidence for the benefits of ecotherapy.⁶⁶

They were also asked about their information needs, and their patients' information needs around conditions such as depression and anxiety. Emotional support was consistently flagged up as the key issue closely followed by information about support groups in the local area. Community nurses rated this as the greatest information need for them and their patients. It is also interesting to note that 44 per cent were interested in learning more about social prescribing and 46 per cent in prevention and early intervention for groups at risk of developing mental health problems.

GPs and community nurses are the front line in delivering health care to our communities and see people everyday who could benefit from ecotherapy services if they were available. The evidence about the benefits of ecotherapy needs to be more widely disseminated and made available to GPs and health professionals delivering community services. Equally CCGs should consider how they can make ecotherapy available in their areas and offer more choice to patients as a way to promote their health and wellbeing and help people living with mental health conditions to manage them better.

Recommendations for clinical commissioning groups

- Increase patient choice by ensuring that ecotherapy is available as a treatment that people can choose to help manage a mental health problem.
- Use ecotherapy to raise and sustain physical activity levels of people who do not normally exercise – including people with existing mental health problems who have a higher risk of developing physical health problems.
- Integrate social prescribing models into patient care pathways to strengthen links between health providers and community and voluntary sector organisations that provide services like ecotherapy.
- Support GPs to consider and recognise the value of ecotherapy.
- Ensure that clinical commissioning strategies reflect the needs identified in the local JSNA, including by targeting groups identified as being less likely to engage with other mental health services.



Conclusion

Health and wellbeing boards, and their colleagues commissioning services for public health, social care and health, are facing unprecedented social, economic and environmental challenges while needing to ensure that services protect and better serve people.

Ecotherapy is an intervention that can help commissioners overcome these challenges:

- With mental health problems such as anxiety and depression increasing significantly, ecotherapy can improve physical health and mental wellbeing. Its flexibility as an intervention means it can be used as a wellbeing service that people can use to look after their mental wellbeing, as an early intervention to support people who may be at risk of developing a mental health problem, or as a treatment in its own right.
- Ecotherapy has widespread appeal. Different age groups, from young to old enjoy it; people from different ethnicities can participate equally; women find it acceptable, and men in particular have found it to be a useful alternative to the limited range of services currently available.
- Ecotherapy has proved to be effective in raising activity levels of people who are reluctant to access organised exercise activities. People with existing mental health problems have a higher risk of developing serious physical health problems – and finding the motivation to exercise can be especially difficult – so ecotherapy is an excellent option for increasing and sustaining their activity levels.
- Ecotherapy has also proved to be effective in reducing social isolation, helping people to build personal support networks. Some people have used ecotherapy as a route back into employment, either finding jobs or using it as a stepping stone to work or further training.
- Ecotherapy can achieve the twin aims of the government's mental health strategy of improving mental health for everyone and improving outcomes for people with mental health problems.



- Ecotherapy interventions can save money by reducing the direct costs of treating people with mental health problems, and brings economic benefits for the state and participants as they find work.
- Social prescribing of ecotherapy can contribute significantly to improving the choice of primary care provision for people with mental health problems and can be made available cost effectively as part of prevention, early intervention and recovery services.

Ecotherapy, as a different approach to health and wellbeing, offers unique opportunities to meet shared outcomes across services, while impacting positively on local people and the areas where they live. The reorganisation of the way health and social care, and public health services are provided – with a growing emphasis on services delivered in the community – gives health and wellbeing boards an opportunity to make sure access to ecotherapy is available everywhere.



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(Breathing Spaces)

St Mary's Secret Garden

St Mungo's (Putting Down Roots)

The Conservation Volunteers

Thrive (Growing4Life)

Trees for Cities (Growing Skills)

York House Community Garden and Mind in
Milton Keynes



Appendix I

Tables of NHS, Mental Health, Public Health and Social Care Outcomes

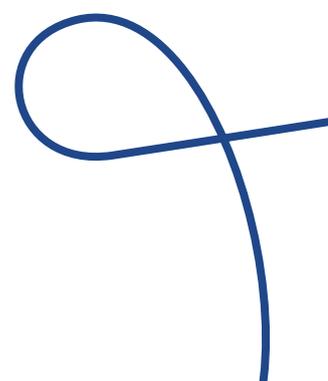
Mental Health Strategy	Mental health outcomes	How ecotherapy helps deliver mental health outcomes
<p><i>No Health without Mental Health</i> Department of Health 2011 Cross Government Mental Health Strategy - identifies the need to promote wellbeing and improve mental health as well as prevent and treat mental health problems</p>	<p>More people will have good mental health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more people of all ages and backgrounds will have better wellbeing and good mental health • fewer people will develop mental health problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecotherapy has a universal appeal • Ecotherapy helps everyone achieve the Five Ways to Wellbeing • Offers a preventive service • Can target isolated and excluded people • People become more resilient
	<p>More people with mental health problems will recover:</p> <p>People have a good quality of life – greater ability to manage their own lives, stronger social relationships, a greater sense of purpose, skills for living and working, improved chances in education, better employment rates and a suitable and stable place to live.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully includes people with mental health problems • Improves wellbeing during and after recovery • Can be part of recovery plans • Can target isolated and excluded people • Supports other treatments and can be a treatment on its own • Pathway to education, training and employment
	<p>More people with mental health problems will have good physical health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fewer people with mental health problems will die prematurely • more people with physical ill health will have better mental health. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are more active and value being active more • Increases interest in healthy lifestyles • People are encouraged to access services to improve physical health • People with physical health problems feel better
	<p>More people will have a positive experience of care and support:</p> <p>Care and support, wherever it takes place, should offer access to timely, evidence-based interventions and approaches that give people the greatest choice and control over their own lives, in the least restrictive environment, and should ensure that people's human rights are protected.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecotherapy is an attractive treatment option for people • Ecotherapy is holistic and flexible • Ecotherapy is accessible to people of all ages and abilities • People with mental health problems are more positive about their treatment and support • Ecotherapy offers people a choice about how to promote their wellbeing
	<p>Fewer people will suffer avoidable harm:</p> <p>People receiving care and support should have confidence that the services they use are of the highest quality and at least as safe as any other public service.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with mental health problems are supported to look after themselves • People with mental health problems extend their social networks and support • People become more resilient • People with mental health problems manage their condition better
	<p>Fewer people will experience stigma and discrimination:</p> <p>Public understanding of mental health will improve and, as a result, negative attitudes and behaviours to people with mental health problems will decrease.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecotherapy is inclusive – people with mental health problems join community activities • Ecotherapy successfully engages isolated and excluded people • Ecotherapy is community based and challenges stigma

NHS Outcomes Framework 2013/14	Shared or complementary outcomes across NHS/Public Health/Social Care	How ecotherapy helps deliver shared or complementary outcomes
¹ NHS+ Public Health+ Adult Social Care	Excess mortality in adults under 75 years with serious mental illness ² Employment of people with mental health problems/long term conditions/in contact with a secondary mental health services ^{1,2}	See related outcomes and indicators in this set of tables
² NHS + Public Health	Employment of people with a learning disability ² Health-related quality of life for people with long-term conditions / social-care related quality of life ³	
³ NHS + Adult Social Care	Improving people's experience of integrated care ³ Adults with a learning disability living in their own home or with their family ⁴	
⁴ Public Health + Adult Social Care	Adults in contact with secondary mental health services living independently, with or without support ⁴ Social isolation ⁴ Proportion of people who use services who feel safe/ older people's perception of community safety ⁴	

Public Health Outcomes Framework 2013/16	Public mental health outcomes	How ecotherapy helps deliver public mental health outcomes
<p>Vision: To improve and protect the nation's health and wellbeing and improve the health of the poorest fastest</p> <p>The strategy focuses on two domains:</p> <p>1. Increased healthy life expectancy And</p> <p>2. Reduced differences in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy between communities through greater improvements in more disadvantaged communities</p>	<p>Improving the wider determinants of health Improvements against wider factors which affect health and wellbeing and health inequalities especially for groups at higher risk of mental health problems. Indicators include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16-18 year olds who are NEET • Employment of people with long term conditions • People who are off work 'sick' • Use of green spaces for exercise/health reasons • Social contentedness • Older people's perception of community safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can successfully engage young people in activities and act as a bridge to education and training • Offers pathway to education, training and employment • Green spaces enhanced and maintained • More people use and value green spaces • People who take part in ecotherapy feel better after even one session • Helps people achieve the Five Ways to Wellbeing • Creates connections within communities so more people know each other and feel safer • Helps people achieve the Five Ways to Wellbeing • People become more resilient
	<p>Health Improvement People are helped to live healthy lifestyles, make healthy choices and reduce health inequalities especially for groups at higher risk of mental health problems. Indicators include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self reported wellbeing • Self reported wellbeing of looked after children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers a holistic service that improves physical and mental health • Helps people achieve the Five Ways to Wellbeing • Improves wellbeing and can bring those with lower scores up to average scores • Helps people achieve the Five Ways to Wellbeing • Increases physical activity levels • Accessible to all age groups • Focuses on healthy lifestyles • Increases access to services especially for excluded people • Peer support for people with problems
	<p>Public healthcare and preventing premature mortality Reduced numbers of people living with preventable ill health and people dying prematurely, whilst reducing the gap between communities. Indicators include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health related quality of life for older people • Suicide • Excess mortality in adults under 75 years with serious mental illness • Dementia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older people enjoy ecotherapy and can be targeted to take part • Ecotherapy services have successfully targeted men (more likely to die from suicide than women especially older men) • Ecotherapy services can be offered to people with dementia and their carers • Can provide purposeful activities for people with mental health conditions and improve their wellbeing • Supports people with mental health problems to manage their condition • Activities are inclusive and everyone can be supported to take part
	<p>Health Protection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecotherapy services train volunteers and participants in safe use of equipment and staff supervise activities • Trained staff facilitate ecotherapy

Clinical Commissioning Groups	CCG Outcome Indicators	How ecotherapy helps deliver CCGs outcome indicators
<p>Clinical Commissioning Groups Outcomes Indicators 2013/14 - relevant to mental health NHS Outcomes Framework</p>	<p>Preventing people from dying prematurely: Reducing premature death in people with serious mental illness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are more active and value being active more • Increases interest in healthy lifestyles • People are encouraged to access services to improve physical health • People with physical health problems feel better • Supports people to manage existing conditions • Peer support for people with problems
	<p>Enhancing the quality of life for people with long term conditions: Ensuring people feel supported to manage their condition and Enhancing quality of life for people with mental health problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to community mental health services by people from BME groups • Access to psychological therapy services by people from BME groups • Recovery following talking therapies (all ages and older than 65) • More people with mental health problems in employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecotherapy successfully engages isolated and excluded people • Supports people to manage existing conditions • Helps people achieve the five ways to wellbeing • People feel better after even one session of ecotherapy • People feel more positive about their life • Improves wellbeing and brings those with lower scores up to average scores • Increases physical activity levels • Accessible to all age groups • Focuses on healthy lifestyles • Peer support for people with problems • Offers pathway to education, training and employment
	<p>Ensuring people have a positive experience of care: Improving experience of healthcare for people with mental illness including community mental health services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecotherapy helps everyone achieve the five ways to wellbeing • Offers a preventive service • Ecotherapy successfully engages isolated and excluded people • Ecotherapy has a universal appeal • Can work with community and specialist mental health services • Ecotherapy is inclusive - people with mental health problems join community activities • Ecotherapy is community based and challenges stigma
<p>Six Lives: Second Progress Report on healthcare for people with learning disabilities Department of Health 2013</p>	<p>All Clinical Commissioning Groups to have registers of all people with learning disabilities or autism who have mental health conditions or behaviour that challenges in NHS-funded care by April 2013 (para 186).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps deliver the Mental Health Strategy to people with learning disabilities • Helps all people achieve the five ways to wellbeing • People are more active and value being active more • Increases interest in healthy lifestyles • People are encouraged to access services to improve physical health
<p>Improving the Health and Wellbeing of People with Learning Disabilities: An Evidence-Based Commissioning Guide for Clinical Commissioning Groups (2012)</p>	<p>Good Practice Guidance to support CCGs, with local authorities and Learning Disability Partnership Boards to commission services in ways that achieve better health outcomes and address the health inequalities of people with learning disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pathway to education, training and employment • People with mental health problems join community activities • Ecotherapy successfully engages isolated and excluded people • Ecotherapy is community based and challenges stigma • Can work with specialist learning disability mental health services

Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework 2013/14	Social care outcomes relevant to mental health	How ecotherapy helps deliver social care outcomes
<p><i>Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework 2013/14</i> Department of Health (2012)</p>	<p>Enhancing the quality of life for people with care and support needs including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People manage their own support as much as they wish • People who use services report they had as much social contact they would like • People can find employment when they want, maintain family and social life, contribute to community life, and avoid loneliness or isolation • People with learning disabilities live in their own home or with their family • Adults in contact with secondary mental health services living independently with or without support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps everyone achieve the Five Ways to Wellbeing • People choose to take part in ecotherapy services • Can target isolated and excluded people • People become more resilient • Meet people and make friends • Take part in social activities • People can use personal budgets to access services • Pathway to education, training and employment • Volunteering opportunities • Receive support from a mental health professional at an ecotherapy service • People learn new skills and develop new interests • People are supported to access community resources and services
	<p>Delaying and reducing the need for care and support including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People have the opportunity to have the best health and wellbeing throughout their life and can access enough support and information to help them manage their care needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecotherapy helps people keep active • Ecotherapy helps people to improve their physical and mental health • People are less socially isolated as they make friends and build support networks • People are more resilient
	<p>Ensuring that people have a positive experience of care and support including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are satisfied with their experience of care and support services • Carers feel they are respected as equal partners throughout the care process • People know what choices are available to them locally what they are entitled to, and who to contact when they need help • The dignity of individuals is respected and support is sensitive to the circumstances of the individual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People enjoy participating in ecotherapy • People decide how much they want to participate • Ecotherapy interventions are tailored to the needs of individuals • Feedback is requested by ecotherapy services to inform service development • Carers are welcomed and kept informed • People are kept informed about ecotherapy services
	<p>Safeguarding adults whose circumstances make them vulnerable and protecting them from avoidable harm including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People enjoy physical safety and feel secure • People are free from physical and emotional abuse, harassment, neglect and self harm • People are protected from avoidable harm, disease and injuries • People are supported to plan ahead and have the freedom to manage risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People feel safe and respected in ecotherapy sessions • Ecotherapy takes place in safe and nurturing environments • People's health and wellbeing is improved • People become more resilient • Ecotherapy challenges stigma and prejudice • People are trained to use equipment and take part in activities safely • People are trained and supported to manage risks i.e. equipment and activities



Appendix 2

Useful Contacts and Resources

Mind

Mind Infoline: 0300 123 3393
(Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm)

email: info@mind.org.uk

web: mind.org.uk

Details of local Minds and other local services, and Mind's Legal Advice Line.

Language Line is available for talking in a language other than English.

Care Farming UK

web: carefarminguk.org

Online directory of local care farms.

The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)

tel: 01302 388 883

web: tcv.org.uk

UK conservation projects and Green Gyms.

Do It

web: do-it.org.uk

UK volunteering opportunities, including environment and conservation options.

Enabling Environments Award

tel: 020 7977 6597

020 7977 4972

web: rcpsych.ac.uk/quality/qualityandaccreditation/enablingenvironments.aspx

A quality mark given by the Royal College of Psychiatrists to those who can demonstrate they are achieving an outstanding level of best practice in creating and sustaining a positive and effective social environment.

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

tel: 0117 923 1800

web: farmgarden.org.uk

Information and directory of city farms that offer therapeutic gardening and farming activities.

Groundwork

web: groundwork.org.uk

Environmental regeneration charity that works with local communities to improve neglected spaces plus volunteering and training opportunities across England.

National Trust

tel: 0844 800 1895

web: nationaltrust.org.uk

Lists walks and open gardens, parks and estates that can be visited.

Natural England

tel: 0845 600 3078

email: enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

web: naturalengland.org.uk

Government advisor on the natural environment plus a series of learning papers on the Access to Nature programme which encouraged people to enjoy the outdoors.

Sustrans

tel: 0117 926 8893

web: sustrans.org.uk

National charity supporting people to cycle, walk and travel more by public transport.

Thrive

tel: 0118 988 5688

web: thrive.org.uk

Charity that runs gardening projects for people with mental health problems plus training and publications on social and therapeutic horticulture.

Walking for Health

tel: 020 7339 8541

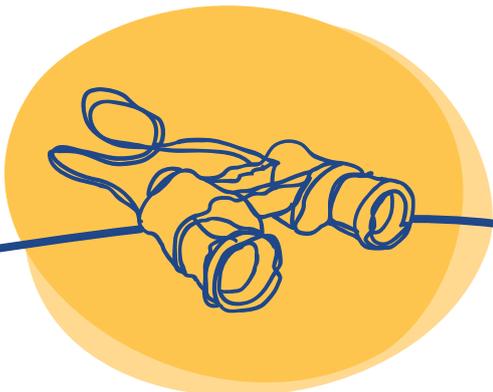
web: walkingforhealth.org.uk

Network of health-walk schemes in England.

Worldwide workers on organic farms (WWOOF)

web: wwooof.org.uk

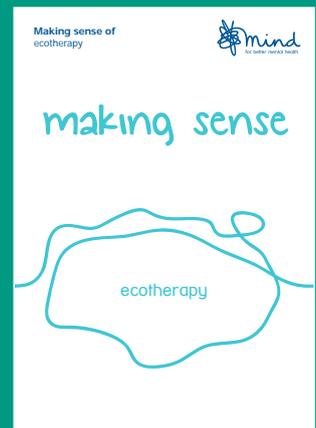
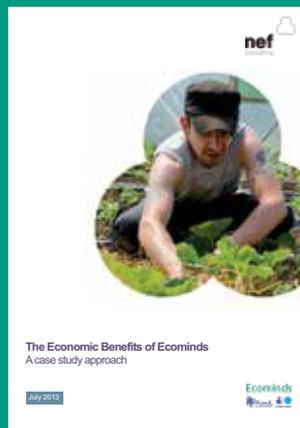
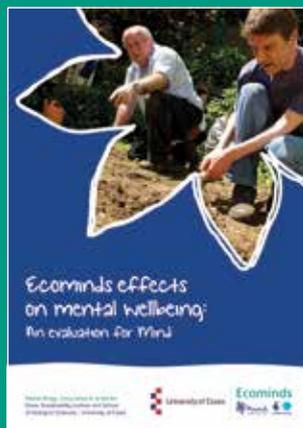
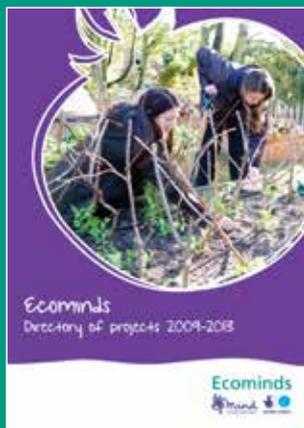
Membership charity that teaches people about organic farming and sustainable living through volunteering opportunities.



Notes

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These documents are downloadable at
mind.org.uk/ecotherapy

To find your local Mind, visit
mind.org.uk/mind_in_your_area

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