

Utilising Green Spaces for Social and Environmental Value

The Sustainability champion network identified an opportunity to utilise green space to grow food. They developed a series of organic vegetable raised beds which form a walking trail. The project has environmental benefits as well as social value through an improvement in the health and wellbeing of staff and patients

Leeds Teaching Hospitals
NHS Trust

Green space & social value

What was the issue being addressed?

St James Hospital is located within inner city Leeds and is surrounded by housing with little or no access to front gardens, food growing or other green spaces. The hospital is in one of the Leeds wards with the highest proportion of people from black and minority groups and has above national average for the number of residents registered as having a limiting long term illness. The Sustainability champion network identified potential to improve the local environment for staff, patients and the local community by utilising the green spaces to support food growing, walking and social interaction.

What action did you take ?

It was recognised buy-in from potential users was essential and that collaboration would be important to secure longevity of the project.



(Libby Sutherland, Sustainability Manager, Craig Richardson Associate Director of Facilities and Estates, Linda Pollard Trust Chair, Ben Williams Head Gardener, Alison Munro Staff Engagement Advisor, Phil Ayres Associate Medical Director)

A wide consultation took place with staff, patients and the community, they were asked to vote on 'themes' for the beds.

The trust approached a local charity Back to Front (BtoF) who have experience of establishing and maintaining local 'growing hubs' or horticultural sites where people come together to grow food and socialise.

As BtoF recognised that a number of hospital staff live locally it funded and provided expertise to help deliver a project for the site.

What was the impact?

The project cost £2000 to develop and deliver. The positive impact on patient, staff and community wellbeing is being evaluated on a qualitative basis:

- The raised beds have been really well received across staff, patients and the local community with over 350 people voting on the themes .
- The Trust physiotherapy department have incorporated the raised beds into some patient treatment plans.
- A food growing education session has been scheduled which will further enhance community cohesion, promote a healthy eating message and improve enhance the food growing skills of staff, patients and local residents.
- The Trust has collaborated with the onsite coffee shop to ensure that used coffee grounds are used as a fertiliser saving an estimated 60kg per month going to landfill.
- The project has had an improvement to staff morale, with themes such as the 'pick me up for lunch' encouraging people to get out of the office and talk to other staff whilst enjoying some healthy free food. Future staff wellbeing surveys will incorporate questions around the gardens helping to further quantify the contribution to improved staff morale.
- High profile/flagship projects, such as this, can help re-energise environmental champion networks and rally them behind a shared, focused objective.
- Engaging a local organisation with community development objectives helps understand the needs and priorities of local communities.

“ Planting and tending to the vegetables allows me to relax and switch off during my lunch break. I find that when I return to the office in the afternoon I am recharged and ready to tackle any work that awaits!”

June Wright, PA in Pharmacy

Lessons learned / success factors?

A great response from the Trust gardening and maintenance teams who value the use of the grounds for patients and staff to join in and enjoy.

Wide stakeholder engagement is key/critical in developing a good idea into a successful project; one site initially chosen for the project was relocated once consultation identified an interest group for the area were particularly interested in flowers and not growing food. Relocation of the site ensured that the raised bed was sited in area that had interested users who were more likely to contribute to its upkeep.

Scaling up

The NHS occupies a significant amount of estate across the UK; there is potential and unexploited value in the productive use of suitable urban space, especially in relation to building community cohesion and resilience. The project may be particularly impactful if replicated in urban communities.

Contact:

Libby Sutherland Sustainability Manager - libby.sutherland@nhs.net