

Natural Health Service Project

Mid-Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust (MEHT) has four sites. The largest, Broomfield Hospital, has two woodlands and additional green space. The Natural Health Service Project (NHSP) focusses on engaging community volunteers to improve these areas, allowing patients, visitors and staff the opportunity to relax.

Mid-Essex Hospitals Trust

Organisational and workforce development and behaviour change

What was the issue being addressed?

Natural areas are well documented in providing therapeutic benefits. For patients, visitors, and staff using a hospital's facilities, it can be a hugely demanding and stressful environment. Making successful management of natural space vital in healthier forms of relaxation. MEHT seeks to address the use of natural landscapes in an urban setting to benefit all.

What action was taken to overcome the issue?

MEHT implemented the NHSP to provide therapeutic natural environments whilst helping to conserve and manage that same space. The success of these aims relied on positive partnership with the surrounding community. All activities are achieved through 100% charitable funding, ranging from digging and planting, to bench re-staining and wildlife conservation.



Puddings Wood Entrance

Kirsty's Elm Project engaged a national issue of reintroducing the elm tree, following on from Dutch Elm Disease in the 1960's; named after the granddaughter of a surviving cancer patient who wanted a sustainable legacy.

Since 2014 City of Chelmsford MENCAP students have attended with professional facilitators to focus on their **Discover Health Programme**. Vegetable and Orchard Gardens offered new practical experiences with a large harvest sown each year.



The Wellbeing Terrace

The Wellbeing Terrace is a relaxing seating area with activities including table tennis and swingball. It was launched with the Trust's Health & Wellbeing campaign.

Two under used courtyards were transformed into **Dementia Gardens**, allowing patients with dementia a safe and therapeutic setting to leave the clinical ward environment.

Bat walks have occurred since 2016, providing a unique twilight experience into a UK native and endangered species.

What was the impact?

NHSP projects have been nationally recognised for their benefits and achievements. Multiple accolades have been attained, including Green Flag Community and HSJ Awards.

Long-term support has also been acquired, with experiences shared to the community. Over 1,200 volunteer participants have taken part in projects since 2012, totalling 5,480 hours and a cost saving equivalent of over ~£76,000 (based on HLF volunteer equivalent salary).

Staff have reported health improvements; the Wellbeing Terrace 2017 survey recorded a 100% therapeutic benefit to users. Individuals feel closer to their community and local hospital, with patients benefitting from project success .



Lessons learned / success factors?

Volunteers are essential and MEHT is hugely honoured to have the support of so many. Promotion around the Trust is vital, building working relationships to improve the patient, visitor and staff experience

Staff members have felt the direct benefits and are able to pass them on to others. Frequent comments of thanks have been passed by those using the natural space.

A visitor attending a bat walk "It's excellent that the hospital invites the public and hosts community events to share in the natural landscape on offer"



Scaling up

MEHT is continuing its volunteering opportunities and community engagement. The accomplishments of volunteers are highlighted to bring an enhanced unity to all associated with the Trust.

By making a similar difference, the NHS as a whole could provide a more sustainable service for future patients, visitors and staff in a more relaxing and therapeutic environment

Contact: David Jackson
Sustainability Project Coordinator
E-mail: David.Jackson2@meht.nhs.uk