

# Case study: Commissioning ecotherapy to improve physical and mental health



Ecominds



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## Summary

This briefing details a number of ecotherapy-style services that have been commissioned by clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) and local authority public health departments.

Ecotherapy services involve people, including those with mental health problems, in getting outdoors, being more active, taking part in green activities and appreciating the natural world, meeting others and learning new skills.

## About commissioning

Since April 2013, CCGs and local authority public health departments in England have the responsibility for commissioning many of the services needed to keep us healthy and well.

Health and wellbeing boards (HWBs), which include representatives from CCGs, local authority public health, social care and children's services departments, were also created at the same time. HWBs work to inform those who commission services, so they can work in partnership and use their budgets to provide the best services for local people. They do this by undertaking a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and develop a joint strategy for how needs can be addressed.

Most local areas will have an agreement, which is sometimes called a Compact, that outlines local arrangements for commissioning services provided by the voluntary and community sector (VCS). The Compact covers issues such as tendering and how the VCS can contribute to needs assessments and use their knowledge of issues – such as mental health – to advocate for services and represent the views of specific groups of people and areas.

Local VCS umbrella organisations are a good place to find out more about a local Compact and information about local commissioning developments and opportunities. It can be a way to make contact with potential partners and collaborators too.

Social value is often mentioned in public services contracts – it means that consideration is given to how a service may improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of an area. One aim of The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 was to support the VCS and social enterprises to win more contracts.

## Find out about the health and wellbeing priorities in your area

Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) assess the current and future health and social care needs of the local community. They may include needs assessments for specific groups such as those likely to have poor health outcomes and may include detailed needs assessments at ward or district level. Mental health should receive an equal priority to physical health.

Joint Strategic Health and Wellbeing Strategies (JHWSs) explain the priorities set to tackle the needs identified in the JSNA and the outcomes to be achieved. This informs local commissioning to meet those outcomes and address needs through locally led initiatives. Look on your local authority website for links to your HWB and strategies in your area.

The Local Government Association has created an interactive online map of all areas priorities at: [local.gov.uk](http://local.gov.uk) search for Health and Wellbeing Board priorities across England. [local.gov.uk/web/guest/health-and-wellbeing-boards/-/journal\\_content/55/10180/6111055/ARTICLE](http://local.gov.uk/web/guest/health-and-wellbeing-boards/-/journal_content/55/10180/6111055/ARTICLE)



## Grozone Community Garden in Northwich

### Summary

Groundwork Cheshire is commissioned by Vale Royal CCG to run 12-week horticultural therapy courses at Grozone for people with mild to moderate depression and anxiety. People are recommended by their GP to attend a weekly two hour session. They take part in horticultural activities, sometimes cook together and share a meal outdoors, and get to know each other.

### The commissioning process

Alistair Cook, Senior Project Manager at Groundwork Cheshire who manages Grozone, says it took a significant time to get the project commissioned from going to early CCG roadshows to tailoring the service proposal to the CCG priorities in their strategy.

“We followed up CCG contacts who seemed interested, but it still took two or three months before first discussions around a possible

service model took place. We had a 10 minute professionally produced DVD and testimonies about our work to help get the message across.”

The CCG approval and formal agreement process took some time too:

“We had a template service level agreement as a starting point, and between us we made adjustments until we had a mutually acceptable version.”

Alistair says the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment is a very important document to get to know. He advises getting involved in local health and wellbeing networks and going to CCG and public health roadshows and events so that you are kept informed and might even meet future partners and collaborators.

For more information, visit: [grozone.org.uk](http://grozone.org.uk)

# Community food growing in Birmingham

## Summary

Birmingham public health department and CCG jointly commissioned a community food growing project targeting vulnerable adults in areas with high levels of deprivation.

The project, delivered by local charity Freshwinds, aims to get people growing, cooking and eating their own food and so increase healthy eating and physical activity as well as improve mental wellbeing. The project is funded by the CCG's mental health budget but managed by the public health department.

## The commissioning process

Freshwinds was asked to deliver a one year pilot and a contract was negotiated. A tender process was not required as the available budget was below financial limits.

Public health and the CCG wanted to work closely together to jointly deliver on broader outcomes – this project with its focus on healthy eating and physical activity provided that opportunity: targeting mental health promotion and linking it to healthy eating and physical activity in a practical way.

The CCG and public health are working on an integrated commissioning framework to overcome duplication in their work programmes that share similar priorities and outcomes. Following a mapping exercise they are focusing on how to re-commission services more collaboratively and spend money more effectively.

## How the project works

Freshwinds uses its existing network of Community Health Champions (CHCs) to provide peer support to people at risk of poor health outcomes. CHCs were trained in food growing, environmental awareness, horticulture, and health and safety. They are matched with community garden projects and allotments in target areas. People are referred from existing networks, and some people refer themselves once they hear about it.

The project makes use of existing community assets by working with eight local food

growing sites. Two new sites have been developed at local hospitals – one a mental health hospital – who asked to take part in the project. They saw benefits for their patients through increased physical activity and improved mental wellbeing demonstrated by people feeling less stressed, more motivated and interested in their surroundings and taking interest in new activities and healthy eating. The hospitals provide the land for food growing and the project provides the CHCs.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Monthly project group meetings include the commissioner, provider and some CHCs who give a unique view on what is happening on the ground. The group is currently looking at the future of the project and reports to the CCG Governance Board.

People who take part on the community food growing project are asked to:

- complete questionnaires about daily fruit and vegetable consumption and another about food growing knowledge
- use a pedometer to measure their physical activity (everyone is given one and measurements taken over three months)
- be weighed at the beginning and end of their involvement
- complete the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale at the beginning and end of their involvement.

People have been happy to take part in monitoring, the CHCs explain why it is needed – to find out about project impact – and data is anonymised.

For more information, visit:

[freshwinds.org.uk/community-health-champions](http://freshwinds.org.uk/community-health-champions)



# Gardens For Life: Community gardens in Tower Hamlets

## Summary

Tower Hamlets is the third most deprived borough in the country. The public health department commissioned a 15 month pilot project to get people enjoying the health and wellbeing benefits that come with being active in open, community spaces and growing and eating their own food. New community gardens grow food on housing estates and neighbourhoods across the borough with sessions on organic food growing and cooking and women-only sessions.

The project fits with strategic priorities for public health such as increasing healthy eating and physical activity and fits with wider strategies such as improving the environment by adding more healthy and green spaces in the borough. Community groups had already shown considerable interest through a thriving food growing network.

## The commissioning process

It took a long time to commission the project because the value of the project meant it had to be tendered. This delayed the project start date until April 2014, three months later than planned, which meant that important springtime preparation was missed – so some outcomes had to be staggered.

The Women's Environmental Network (WEN) successfully bid to be the lead organisation delivering 15 community gardens across

the borough in partnership with three large registered social landlords, Capital Growth and Sustain. WEN said the tender process was hard; as a small organisation they had to quickly get up to speed with required internal policies and procedures and they were aware that they were bidding against national organisations that already had this in place and were used to tendering.

“We played to our strengths – we had networks already in place from other food growing projects, so we knew the area and the people on the ground.”

Women's Environmental Network.

## How the project works

WEN already run food growing projects in Tower Hamlets and have relationships with housing associations who provide land for gardens. This added value was important to the success of their tender.

“Organisations that are embedded in the community are more likely to be able to get off the ground quickly and that makes them more sustainable in the long term.”

Susie Crome, Public Health Locality Manager, Tower Hamlets.

One local estate now has three growing areas and another garden on an isolated estate is particularly successful. There has been a strong involvement from the Bengali community by both men and women.

## Monitoring and evaluation

The project has a steering group that meets quarterly and the public health commissioner keeps in close touch with the project. Case studies tracking the journeys of participants are being developed and the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale is used. Completing this has been difficult for some participants who are not literate as they may not want to share with others how they are feeling.

For more information, visit:  
[wen.org.uk/your-wen/local-food/tower-hamlets-gardens-for-life](http://wen.org.uk/your-wen/local-food/tower-hamlets-gardens-for-life)



# Five Ways to Wellbeing in Knowsley

## Summary

Merseyside Adult Health and Lifestyle Survey 2012 showed that 22 per cent of adults in Knowsley were obese and 37 per cent overweight – and a 2012/13 survey showed that adults in Knowsley had the second lowest scores for mental wellbeing in the north west and these levels increase with age and were higher in deprived areas.

Knowsley public health team commissioned a programme in April 2014 to help tackle obesity and improve mental wellbeing using activities for adults that focused on the natural environment and green assets using the Five Ways to Wellbeing as a framework.

## The commissioning process

The programme has been funded through the mental health promotion budget but has impacts for several healthy lifestyle outcomes such as increasing physical activity.

A formal tendering process was used to select the successful provider Landlife, a charity based at the National Wildflower Centre in Knowsley. Landlife had been delivering a similar project with Big Lottery Fund support across the north west, which had been very well attended, was good at attracting new people and at keeping people involved.

*“There were a surprising number of bids, some were very strong. It’s important to tell us what’s special about your service.”*

Susannah Quinn, Public Health Programme Manager, Knowsley.

## How the project works

Landlife had experience and skills of working with people with mild and moderate mental health problems such as depression. They also had case studies showing how people had benefited from their involvement in 10 week courses, see: [wildflower.co.uk/projects/projects.htm](http://wildflower.co.uk/projects/projects.htm)

Activities take place in green locations around Knowsley as well as at the Wildflower Centre. Health trainers and health professionals



can refer people to the programme and the programme can refer into the Lifestyle Hub which is a one stop shop for Knowsley’s lifestyle services, such as weight management and smoking cessation support.

## Monitoring and evaluation

The project meets quarterly with the commissioner to review progress and present quantitative and qualitative information on targets and trends such as how many people attend and increased levels of physical activity. Knowsley wellbeing services use the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale to measure progress. People are asked about their physical activity levels informally rather than use a formal measurement tool as some people found additional paperwork off putting. The programme forms part of a wider wellbeing agenda in Knowsley.

Some of the learning this process has brought about is the need to turn monitoring and data into intelligence. It’s important to build in time to collate and analyse data so that it informs future working and refinement of outcomes.

For more information, visit: <http://wildflower.co.uk>



# Active Minds in Croydon

## Summary

Active Minds is a service run by Mind in Croydon and funded by Croydon's public health department and other funders such as Comic Relief, The City Bridge Trust and the Maudsley Charity. The project used local media to raise its profile and invests time in building strong relationships with commissioners and funders.

## The commissioning process

Active Minds is an established project that predates the changes in health commissioning in April 2013. This meant that the project's impact was well known to local commissioners and was already being funded to improve health outcomes for people with mental health problems in Croydon by the former Primary Care Trust.

One strategy for maintaining this commitment from commissioners was to raise the local profile of Active Minds. Richard Pacitti, Chief Executive of Mind in Croydon, says it is important to be media savvy so that commissioners and decision makers know your service and what it does. Active Minds is a photogenic and memorable way to show how people with mental health problems benefit from physical activities. Staff regularly invite the local press to events – for example the visit of a national celebrity (the boxing project is run by a world champion boxer), or just to join them on the allotment. Richard says “feel good” stories are always in demand.

“If there is a new director of Public Health, get to know him or her, build a relationship, send invites to your events, maybe ask them to speak at your annual general meeting and do the same with local health professionals.”

## How the project works

Active Minds gives people with mental health problems the chance to take up a new activity to improve their physical and mental health, develop an interest and get involved in the community.

To access the service people need to complete a referral form with their healthcare professional. People are supported to take part by a buddy and can choose from sports such as boxercise,



badminton, football and swimming, even sailing, and a horticulture project based on an allotment.

Staff have also recently trained as smoking cessation advisors in an attempt to reduce tobacco smoking, which is significantly higher among people with mental health problems.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Over time, staff found that people report being part of a group is one of the most important benefits for them. The project uses the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale to measure project impact and has had several positive independent evaluations.

Weight was also measured, but was not straightforward – the boxing project initially measured weight but found some people put on weight because they needed to and others didn't lose weight but waistlines shrank as they became fitter.

“Be proactive and think about other pots of money too – maybe about healthy weight, diabetes prevention, smoking cessation, targeting hard to reach groups – people with mental health problems need health promotion too. Then go and talk to the commissioners.”

Richard Pacitti, Chief Executive Croydon Mind

For more information, visit:

[mindincroydon.org.uk/active-minds.asp](http://mindincroydon.org.uk/active-minds.asp)

# Recovery in Bassetlaw

## Summary

Recovery, is a new project run by Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust and Bassetlaw Mind. It continues the work of the former Ecominds project based at the Idle Valley Nature Reserve near Retford.

## The commissioning process

The CCG requested a partnership between Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust and Mind in Bassetlaw because they wanted an organisation with mental health experience to get involved.

Su Hallam of Bassetlaw Mind explained they have always had a good relationship with health commissioners. The funding has enabled Mind to employ a part-time worker to link people with mental health problems with the project. Mind recently held their annual sponsored walk around the lake in the nature reserve:

“People loved it and asked for a tour of the project and if they could visit or join. It looks like there’s a wider group of people with mental health problems interested in being involved.”

## Monitoring and evaluation

Mind has a simple agreement with commissioners and an outline agreement with the Wildlife Trust who manage the nature reserve and developed the original project. It outlines how they would like to work together and each other’s responsibilities. The CCG are discussing funding for next year and Bassetlaw Mind is optimistic it will continue and that funding may increase. They produce case studies of people’s journeys to recovery and are looking at using the recovery star (a tool for measuring change and outcomes with people) in the future.

“Don’t ever think people are fed up hearing about you and your work.”

Sue Hallam, Mind Service Manager, Bassetlaw Mind.





# Master Gardeners in Lincolnshire

## Summary

The Master Gardeners pilot project was funded by Lincolnshire Health and Wellbeing Fund supported by NHS Lincolnshire and Lincolnshire County Council. It's now funded by Lincolnshire Public Health with close involvement from the district councils.

Master Gardeners are a network of volunteers who offer free food growing advice and support to local communities and people. Lincolnshire is a large rural county that includes small and isolated villages.

## Master Gardeners

The horticultural charity, Garden Organic manages the project. Rick Aron, Lincolnshire Master Gardeners manager says that different areas have different strategic priorities: district councils may want a community garden in a particular area and to tackle rural deprivation and public health want to people being more physically active and to reduce obesity. Gardening and food growing can hit all of these targets and a community garden can quickly become a focus for activity.

Master Gardeners have supported a homeless shelter, run shared cook and grow events, built community gardens, and supported schools and children's centres but the heart of the project is volunteers helping people to get gardening.

"A senior manager was a gardener and immediately saw the potential, we found the same with some councillors who were gardeners – they got it, we still have to prove the impact of what we do but it helped."

Rick Aron, Master Gardeners, Lincolnshire.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Regular meetings with the commissioners from the county and district councils update on progress and review targets such as how many people are involved.

A 2014 social return on investment study of Master Gardening showed that every pound invested resulted in £10.70p social return:

"These benefits to society are in the form of social, economic and environmental outcomes including health and wellbeing, community participation, training and carbon sequestration."<sup>1</sup>

There are now seven master gardener programmes around the country with each working closely with commissioners to focus on their strategic priorities and outcomes. See: [lincolnshire.mastergardeners.org.uk/about/the-programme/](http://lincolnshire.mastergardeners.org.uk/about/the-programme/)

<sup>1</sup> Schmutz, E, Courtney, P and Bos, E (2014) The Social Return on Investment (SROI) of the Master Gardener Programme.



# Tips for successful commissioning

- **Get to know the local commissioning landscape** – develop an in-depth understanding by finding out about local priorities your areas Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Joint Strategic Health and Wellbeing Strategy, find out where the money is and how much.

“It needed perseverance: it took a year from initial enquiries to getting the agreement signed on the dotted line.”

Alistair Cook, Senior Project Manager,  
Grozone, Groundwork Cheshire.

- **Build relationships with commissioners, elected representatives, mental health services and other VCS organisations** – this helps your service gain a profile with them and keeps you informed of changes in strategy and timelines as well as new opportunities.

“Having another partner can be a strength and make the bid stronger.”

Susannah Quinn, Public Health  
Programme Manager, Knowsley.

- **Think about collaborating with others** – look at contract arrangements and consider if your organisation could deliver part of it. Although this might mean a smaller piece of the pie it may mean a stronger bid. Look around for potential partners and start talking to them.

“We’re part of a Natural Health Service consortium promoting health and wellbeing in natural green spaces in Cheshire and Merseyside – it includes the VCS and academics – discussions there led to us thinking more about how we monitor and evaluate our therapeutic services.”

Alistair Cook, Senior Project Manager,  
Grozone, Groundwork Cheshire.

- **Show how your organisation can add value** – by achieving other health and social outcomes and maximising every opportunity to improve health and wellbeing; if you don’t tell commissioners about it they won’t know.

- **Complete tender documents carefully and always answer all the questions** – commissioners say many applicants fail because of this.

“It was a mammoth effort and we had to get on track with procurement issues like having a whistleblowing policy but it’s done now and we can use it for other bids in the future.”

Gardens for Life, Tower Hamlets,  
Women’s Environmental Network.

- **Be aware that commissioning services takes time.** A process needs to happen on the commissioners’ side for service specifications to be approved, followed by a tendering process (or provider selection and discussions if the project falls below the amounts requiring a tender) then contract negotiation and approvals such as legal sign off.

“It takes a long time to go through the commissioning process so an organisation has to be able to cope with that ‘wait’ and already have an infrastructure.”

Susie Crome, Public Health Locality  
Manager, Tower Hamlets.

- **Think about involving local health professionals such as local GPs in your management structure or help them become aware of what you do** – they can be strong advocates with CCGs and public health departments. Consider getting health professionals involved in your work, if appropriate, as this can add weight to your service with commissioners.
- **Keep publicising your work so that commissioners and others know about it. Invite people to events and to visit your service** – send named invitations not a general invite – it’s a good way for them to find out about what you do and meet the people using it, seeing the impact of work in practice is very powerful.