

Participant Information Sheet for Project Staff, Volunteers and Referral Services

What is the feasibility of prescribing community gardening to reduce loneliness and improve wellbeing in individuals with mental health problems?

My name is Dr Carly Wood and I am a Lecturer in the School of Sport, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science at the University of Essex. I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and ask Trust Links staff or the University of Essex researchers if you have any questions. Participation in this research is voluntary.

What is the purpose of the study?

Community gardening can improve wellbeing through the opportunities it provides for engagement with nature, physical activity, healthy eating, learning and social contact. These multiple health-enhancing elements also make it beneficial for individuals with mental health problems; however, evidence of these benefits is limited. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of community gardening on the experience of loneliness, wellbeing, life satisfaction and connection to nature in individuals with mental health problems; and the barriers and facilitators to use of these types of projects.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether you wish to take part in this research study. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to provide your consent and to take part in a one-to-one interview with one of the researchers. You can decline to answer any of the questions in the interview. If you decide that you do not want to continue participating in the research project during the interview you can withdraw your consent and the answers you have given. After the interview is complete it will not be possible to withdraw your data as all responses are anonymous. If you do change your mind and decide to withdraw from this research, please either tell Trust Link staff or contact the research team.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you consent to take part in the project, you will be asked to take part in a one-to-one interview with a researcher, lasting approximately 45 minutes. If you are a project volunteer or staff member, you will be asked about your experience of the impact of Growing Together on the loneliness and mental health of participants, and the barriers to involvement. If you are an individual who refers to Growing Together, you will be asked about the reasons for referring to this project and any barriers to access and referral. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. All interviews will be anonymous and recorded on a digital recording device. We will not ask you for any personal information that can be used to identify who you are.

What are the risks of taking part?

Participating in this study is not intended to cause you any psychological discomfort. The interview may ask questions about your experience of the impact of Growing Together on the and mental health of participants. It is possible that you might find some of these questions upsetting. However, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel

comfortable with. Should you become upset or distressed you may stop the interview at any time. Should you feel you require any mental health support, please contact a staff member at Trust Links or your GP.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The research is unlikely to benefit you directly. However, the research will help us to understand how community gardening can benefit individuals with mental health problems and the challenges and barriers to taking part and referring to these types of projects. This information will help us to promote and support further use and referral to nature-based projects and to increase their availability across the UK, which may help others in the future. The findings of the research may also help Trust Links obtain funding to sustain and develop the Growing Together projects in the future.

Will my information be kept confidential?

An electronic copy of your consent document will be created by Trust Links staff, then sent to and securely stored by the University of Essex researchers on a password protected Box folder. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The interviews will be transcribed by a Transcription company, during this process any potentially identifying information will be removed. All transcripts will be stored securely on a password protected database that is only accessible to staff on the research project via a password protected login.

All of the information that you provide will remain confidential, unless you tell us something that indicates that you or someone else is at risk of harm. We would discuss this with you before telling anyone else.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The findings of this study will be reported to the research funders and shared with other organisations. They may also be published in academic and professional journals and presented at conferences, but all data will be anonymised. We may use direct quotes from your interview responses, but no information will be given that would enable the reader/audience to identify you. If you wish to receive a summary of the research findings, please contact the principal researcher using the contact details provided below.

Who has reviewed the project?

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Humanities, Science and Health Ethics Sub-Committee at the University of Essex.

Who is funding the project?

This project is funded by the Loneliness and Social Isolation in Mental Health Research Network. For more information see: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/psychiatry/research/epidemiology-and-applied-clinical-research-department/loneliness-and-social-isolation>

Concerns and complaints

If you have any concerns about any aspect of the study or you have a complaint, in the first instance please contact the principal investigator of the project, Dr Carly Wood, using the contact details below. If are still concerned, please contact the University's Research Governance and Planning Manager, Sarah Manning-Press (e-mail sarahm@essex.ac.uk). Please include the ERAMS reference which is ETH2021-0911.

Research Team Members

The details of the team involved in this research project are:

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