

Testing RSPB nature connections at the Western General Hospital

Through the summer and spring of 2023, NHS Lothian Charity worked with RSPB Scotland to test nature connection activities and a series of wellbeing workshops with staff and patients at the Western General Hospital. Despite growing evidence that nature connections make us healthier and happier, they are not routinely integrated into our healthcare journeys.

This pilot project explored how nature based activity could be delivered in a busy acute hospital. It showed that using natural materials and stories to improve nature connection decreased feelings of isolation, and contributed to improving patients' health and wellbeing. The activities were particularly important for patients on wards with no access to gardens or greenspace.



This little bird can be my little pet friend. It makes me think of my mother's garden and of my garden back home."

Patient

Nature connection

RSPB Scotland tested the Nature Connection model, with particular focus on two wards, one with access to the outdoors and one without, as well as on staff wellbeing. The following activities were delivered:

- Patient-centered nature connection activities - The nature connection journey started by providing activities that could be done on the ward with activity bags and taster sessions. For many people this was their first step into using the outdoors as a therapeutic environment.
- Staff wellbeing and nature activities - Workshops were delivered to staff to help build their confidence, increase their understanding of nature, and benefit their own wellbeing.
- Biodiversity enhancements - With expert advice from RSPB, the NHS staff and volunteers enhanced the biodiversity of the ward gardens. This increased the number and diversity of birds at the feeders with people now seeing blue tits, and great tits as well as many more sparrows and bullfinches.

Findings from the pilot

Outcomes

The activities had profoundly positive effects, and participants told us the project led to the following outcomes:

- Improved mental and physical wellbeing
- Greater awareness of and access to nature
- Improved connection to local green spaces and wildlife
- Improved confidence in use of nature connection resources
- Increased knowledge of biodiversity

The most telling of all the outcomes was both patients and staff reporting an improvement in health and wellbeing, the pinnacle of the pilot, showing the positive impacts and benefits of connections to nature on overall wellbeing.

Many of the NHS staff involved in the project have committed to continuing using the nature resources ensuring the project has an ongoing legacy.

350

Pollinator
friendly
spring bulbs
planted



It was really good getting the patients out into the courtyard. They seem to be eating their lunch better today after being out."

NHS staff

25

Hours of staff wellbeing and nature workshops delivered



The workshops have brought a very different dimension to my life, and I really appreciate having my eyes open to what nature has to offer us all."

NHS staff

38

Patient -
centered
sessions



All our patients loved the singing birds, and it was a good prompt for them to remember nature."

NHS staff



