

Awards for Learning, Development and Research

Name of award holder	Lucie Johnson
Award category	Constance Owens Liverpool Award for Service Development
Year	2023
Title of project	Therapeutic Gardening group for the Sudbury Community

Aim

A gardening-based therapeutic initiative was launched in Sudbury, Suffolk, targeting local community members. The initial pilot ran from 12 October to 16 November 2023, involving five participants from health and social care services. The project is ongoing, with an extended pilot scheduled for late spring through autumn 2024 to further evaluate and refine the approach.

Outcomes

The project successfully integrated Occupational Therapists from both health and social care sectors, with additional support from Physiotherapists. Partnerships were formed with third-sector organizations, including local garden centres, a community gardening initiative (with referral potential), a fast-food outlet providing refreshments, the local council (for waste management), and the Mywish charity. Two volunteers were recruited, one of whom contributed to the 2023 pilot. Strong ties continue with the Social and Therapeutic Horticulture in Palliative Care network.

The project highlighted the positive impact of meaningful therapeutic activities on physical and mental health. It boosted morale among Occupational Therapists within the trust, sparking interest in replicating the model in other Integrated Neighbourhood Teams. A participant from the pilot created a short film about her experience, which was shared on the trust's YouTube channel and presented to the divisional board. The initiative was also showcased during OT Week 2023 and presented as a Quality Improvement (QI) project to students at the University of East Anglia in 2024. It is now featured on the Life QI platform and will be shared via the RCOT Innovation Hub.

Participants received assessments and interventions within the group setting, eliminating the need for traditional home visits. This approach demonstrated cost savings. Participant goals included reducing social isolation, alleviating fear of falling, and coping with bereavement. Post-activity assessments using the Wellbeing Distress Thermometer indicated reduced distress levels. The Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM) was trialed and will be further refined in the upcoming extended pilot.