



How to Improve Inclusion for People with Dementia and Their Carers in Community Gardens



Introduction

This report summarises the findings from Growing Support's 2016 project with the Dementia Wellbeing Service which aimed to improve inclusion for people living with dementia and their carers in community gardening activities in Bristol.

Community gardening and other 'green volunteering' opportunities are good for the health and wellbeing of people living with dementia and their carers but are not widely taken up.

We recommend some simple and achievable steps that community gardens can take to change this and enable more people living with dementia and their carers to be actively involved in their garden.

Community gardens have much to offer people living with dementia and their carers

- Beautiful, natural spaces to relax
- Meaningful activities and volunteering opportunities
- Sociable groups of volunteers to work alongside
- A range of activities which can be adapted to suit different peoples' needs, abilities and interests
- Geographic spread of opportunities across the city

Community gardens can play an important role in improving the health and wellbeing of people living with dementia and their carers

- Spending time in nature helps us relax, reducing anxiety, stress and associated depression.
- Volunteering is good for our health as well as our local community. Evidence suggests that volunteering can help improve quality of life, self-esteem and sense of purpose.
- Socialising and developing strong social networks is shown to be important for good mental health and wellbeing.
- Gardening provides opportunities for physical exercise which helps us keep fit, manage our weight and reduce the risk of serious illness such as stroke, heart disease, diabetes or high blood pressure

People living with dementia and their carers face barriers to contributing to community gardening activities

- Of the 26 gardens we surveyed only 3 had people living with dementia taking part in their activities.
- Practical barriers such as lack of transport or parking, uneven paths, no accessible toilet or no shelter to work in during poor weather are common.
- Many community gardens are thinly resourced or volunteer run and are often lacking in awareness or confidence in how to improve inclusion.
- People living with dementia and their carers are often not aware of the green volunteering opportunities available to them.

This project aimed to better understand the green volunteering landscape and offer practical help and advice to increase inclusion

- Contacted **73** green volunteering opportunities in Bristol and completed **site surveys** with **26** of them.
- Produced and promoted a **map of green volunteering opportunities in Bristol** with details of the accessibility of each site for people with dementia and their carers: <http://tinyurl.com/ho3qe8v>
- Delivered **2 training events** on how to engage people with dementia in community gardening activities reaching **11** community garden staff and volunteers.
- Delivered **9 'taster visits'** to 3 community garden sites, with **25** attendances from **28** people: **12** people with dementia, **2** family carers and **14** care and support staff.
- Produced **resource pack** for people living with dementia and their carers to use to take part in social and therapeutic horticulture activities at home.

Positive Outcomes

- Improved access to information on green volunteering opportunities in Bristol and their accessibility for people with dementia and their carers.
- Observed outcomes for people with dementia taking part:
 - 89% socialised with other members of the group / worked together on a shared activity
 - 81% exercised fine and gross motor skills
 - 81% became more aware of their surroundings and reflected on the activity
 - 49% learnt something new
 - 62% made something for someone else or helped someone else

These are important observations as they show that many participants achieved the 5 Ways to Wellbeing by taking part.

- Of the staff and volunteers who took part in the training 70% of attendees reported that their knowledge and skills in engaging service users with dementia in gardening activities on their site had increased as a result.

Practical and achievable recommendations for community gardens to improve inclusion for people living with dementia and their carers

1. **Encourage your staff and volunteers to access training in dementia awareness.** Many staff and volunteers perceive the risks and issues of including people with dementia and their carers to be far greater than they are. There are plenty of free resources available to improve awareness of the needs of people with dementia such as the Dementia Friends initiative: <https://www.dementiafriends.org.uk/> or Social Care Institute for Excellence: <http://www.scie.org.uk/dementia/e-learning/>
2. **If possible access training in social and therapeutic horticulture (STH) to learn best practice in adapting gardening activities to different people's**

needs. This can be done through visiting another project which works with people living with dementia, contacting Growing Support or other STH training organisations such as Thrive: <http://www.thrive.org.uk/>

3. **Promote your activities with local organisations that support people living with dementia,** such as the Alzheimer's Society, memory service or local day service providers. Many community gardens don't have the capacity to identify people with dementia in their community. Local organisations who work with people living with dementia can play their part by signposting their service users to green volunteering opportunities. They may also be able to provide transport or accompany participants on their visit.
4. **Have an open discussion about what support participants living with dementia need and you are able to offer at your community garden.** Many community gardens worry about the impact involving more people with dementia in their activities will have on their limited staff and volunteer time. However this needn't be a barrier to inclusion. Many people with dementia live independently in the community and will not need high levels of support to take part. They may just need you to make small adjustments to the way you explain things and the activities they take part in. If people do need higher levels of support it is ok for you to request that they bring a carer or support worker with them.
5. **Treat participants with dementia like everybody else:** Ensure the group or person living with dementia is encouraged to join in with all usual activities including lunch or tea breaks. This time is just as important in feeling part of the gardening community. If you have larger groups of people with dementia and their carers taking part, consider splitting this group up so that they can work in ones or twos with other garden volunteers. This prevents the people living with dementia appearing separate or different and helps with social interaction as larger groups may appear less approachable and more difficult to engage with.
6. **Take steps to ensure your site and activities are accessible to people with limited mobility.** This includes wheelchair users but also people who may need to garden from a seated position or who are not able to garden at ground level. Walk around your site and identify which areas are accessible and focus your activities in these areas. Invest in long handled, light weight garden tools such as peta-uk.com/product-category/garden-tools/ . Have seating available that can be moved next to beds if people need to sit down to take part. Raised beds, containers and table top activities can all help with accessibility too.

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