

The Natural Health Service, OTR Bristol

Community Pot Micro Projects

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Off The Record (OTR) is a youth mental health charity and movement with and for young people. We offer a broad range of services to young people so that they can better support themselves and those around them to have improved mental health and wellbeing. We recognize that there are many ways to support positive mental health, and also that young people are best placed to make decisions about their own care and to decide what they need.



We recognize that mental health is a social, political and environmental issue as well as an individual one, and so we provide services that take this into account, and try to take a holistic approach to wellbeing. Noting the relationship between ones social, physical and mental health, and offering services that do the same.

The Natural Health Service aims to engage young people in nature based activities which have well evidenced mental health benefits. These types of activities offer a different and low cost way for young people to engage in 'wellbeing' related self-care, and in turn offer positive social connections as well as a broader scale connection to nature itself.

What the funding was for:

OTR received funding from the Healthwatch Community Pot to pilot these nature based activities with young people. The aims of the projects were to improve young people's self-esteem, mental and physical health, social connections, and self-care strategies through offering opportunities to connect with nature in meaningful ways. The funding was used to pilot three micro projects, allowing OTR to try out different formats and styles of delivery of this work, and to consider how we might best continue to develop this area of our service in the future.



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The Woodland Warmer

Delivered in Partnership with the Forest of Avon Trust

This 8 week project ran every Wednesday through March and April 2018, with a group of 8 young people aged 16 to 25. This was a 'sign up' group, offering a regular and predictable social connection with other young people.

It was based in a woodland in Tickenham, just outside

Bristol, and transport was provided from the OTR offices. The sessions included mindfulness activities, walking, fire making, whittling, journaling, nature based arts and crafts and spending time with animals on the farm.

The aim of the course was to offer young people new self-care strategies through mindful based activities. It was also a chance to step away from the busyness of their daily lives, and to connect with a group of young people who may have similar experiences to themselves. It was offered at this time of year with the aim of supporting young people to transition out of winter and into spring, a time of year which sees the highest suicide rates.



'I really liked the way you got us to look at trees and nature in a new way. I can see how my body and my veins look so like the trees branches and that's a nice feeling'

Participant aged 17

'I liked meeting all the animals. I'm going to go and do an animal husbandry course now.'

Participant aged 23

'It's reminded me how much I love being out in the countryside and the space it gives you. I'm going to get my cousins doing all this stuff when we go camping in the summer'

Participant aged 21

'I loved watching Spring arrive and seeing the plants grow a bit more every week'

Participant aged 19

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Learning from the Woodland Warmer

Through this project we learnt that delivering in partnership with existing organisations means we can share expertise. We were able to offer young people a high quality nature connection experience, while also being supported by specialist mental health workers and having the connection to OTR to ensure any further needs that are identified can be responded to effectively. We had good attendance on the course. We believe this was due to transport being provided from a familiar location (OTR), and the fact that people had to sign up to the course rather than dropping in.

'It was a nice friendly group of people which made me feel comfortable'.

Participant aged 21

'I'd definitely do it again and maybe bring a friend next time'

Participant aged 17



A Wordle capturing the feelings identified by participants following each Woodland Warmer session:



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“Everyone who came to the allotment drop in last week came back yesterday! Not only did we make a raised bed but it was such a social space where we talked about all sorts (including politics), we also had some mindful moments watching our new friend the Robin and one young person conquered their fear of the compost toilet (eek my turn next!).”

Wellbeing Practitioner

“Whoop whoop to the staff who ran the New Roots garden yesterday. I went with a young person who totally loved it and wants to come every week from now on. We had a really great time and this space and idea is amazing

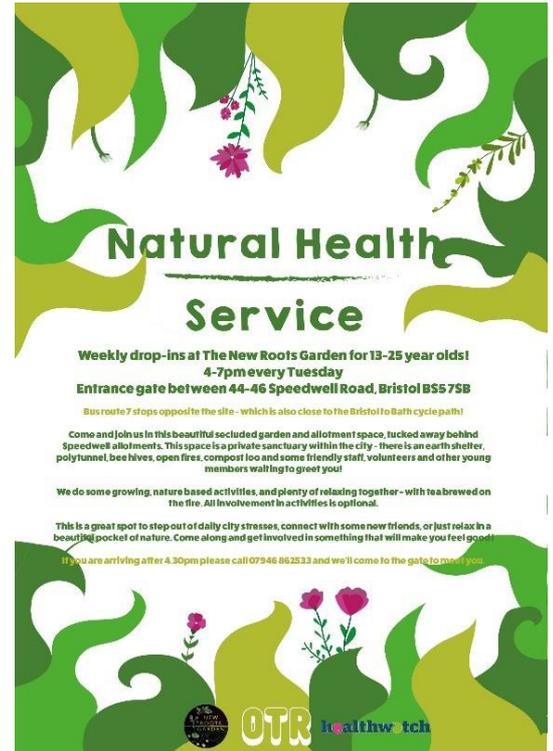
”
CAMHS Worker

“I love the allotment. It's more than an allotment really. I like being outside and doing stuff and seeing the same faces every week. It just makes me feel calm I think.”
Young Person

The New Roots Drop in Allotment sessions.

These drop in sessions for young people aged 14 to 25, ran every Tuesday afternoon from 4 to 7pm from June to late September 2018. They ran at The New Roots Garden in Speedwell, and were delivered by a sessional worker alongside one of OTR's Wellbeing Practitioners. The sessions attracted a group of six regular attenders, with four young people usually attending each session.

Sessions were informal and relaxed, and offered young people a chance to relax in a beautiful natural setting and to get involved in a range of practical tasks. Sessions included: Home making elderflower cordial in the outdoor kitchen, building raised beds, planting and tending to vegetables, whittling hazel signs for the OTR vegetable bed and building a pizza oven. Young people could also choose to simply relax in this beautiful setting, making tea on the fire and spending time with familiar people.



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Making Elderflower Cordial, June 2018



Learning from the New Roots Allotment

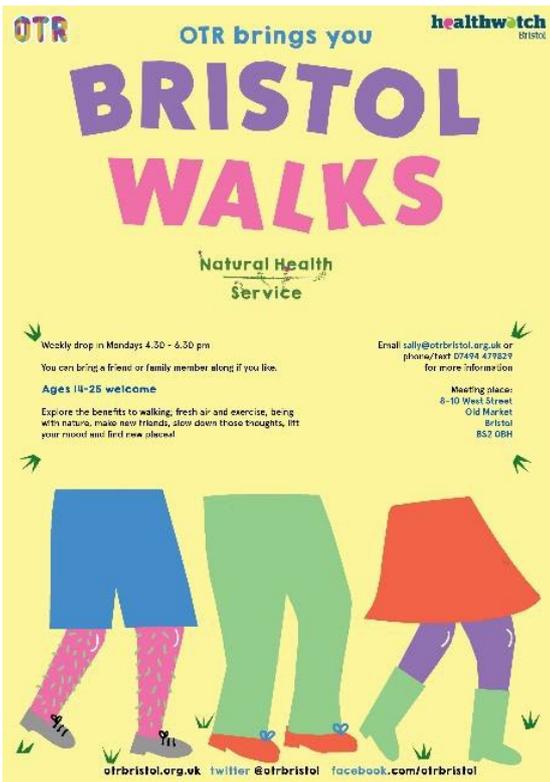
The allotment sessions were generally a success, and there was regular attendance from a group of young people who clearly gained a lot from coming.

There was a 100% return rate once someone had attended a session. However we realised that all young people who attended had met one of the workers directly at an OTR HUB or event, and no one came who had only seen the poster or been told about it by someone else. This meant uptake was limited, as the worker was sessional and so spent limited time at HUB's or other OTR groups. This clearly demonstrated that relationships are key to building up this service.



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Bristol Walks

From April to September 2018 the walking group has taken place every Monday evening from the OTR Hub in Old Market. The walking group was enjoyed by young people coming to OTR for the first time and also regulars.

The group provided an opportunity for young people to get outdoors and explore the city, we also foraged for food, played games such as geo-caching and visited local landmarks. One week, we walked to the OTR allotments and spent the afternoon there linking in with the team that run the weekly sessions and exploring other natural settings. The walks provided young people with a regular opportunity for self-care, positive interaction and improved wellbeing.

Learning from Bristol Walks

Many young people expressed interest in the group, however regular numbers weren't as high as hoped and the group usually consisted of one regular young person and between one and three others who would drop in. The low uptake could be for various reasons. Most groups at OTR are more structured and offer something that can be planned, manage expectations and also measured. The walking group was an opportunity of non-structured social fun whereby young people could come together and make friends, however this can also be daunting and unfamiliar. Summer was extremely hot and young people wanted to avoid being outdoors for a couple of months on the trot.

"The walking group was a good opportunity to get outside in the fresh air, get some gentle exercise and explore Bristol a bit more, but being able to do this with other people. Everybody was friendly and it gave me something to look forward to each week"

Young Person

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What next?

We are excited to have now recruited a member of staff to develop and deliver this project on an ongoing basis. The project has now changed its name to 'Nature Works', and will be officially launched in Spring 2019.

Each micro-project showed positive outcomes for the individuals who accessed them, and received very positive feedback from the young people. The main challenge for the projects was engaging numbers of young people which we believe was difficult for a range of reasons, but most obviously the fact the micro projects were delivered by sessional staff, meant there was limited scope for the workers to develop and build relationships with young people prior to their arriving at a service. We also noted that uptake was higher and more consistent when we delivered something as a sign up course, and that we were able to offer a broader range of experiences when we delivered something in partnership with a specialist organisation.

From Spring 2019, 'Nature Works' will be offering:

- A weekly allotment drop in, focusing on food growing.
- 1:1 Therapeutic sessions held at the private allotment space.
- Sign up therapeutic groups based at the allotment, including mindfulness and other nature connection tools for self-care.
- A Community Kitchen run weekly and in collaboration with the allotment group for fresh produce.
- Regular seasonal groups run in collaboration with other specialist organisations. Including Wild Place, Avon Wildlife Trust, Cultivate, St Werburgh's City Farm and others.

As an organisation we recognise the enormous potential of this area of work and have learnt a great deal from these three projects. We are very grateful to Healthwatch for the opportunity to pilot this work.



For more information about the new Nature Works project
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