

Environmental Social Prescribing: SIG Penrose Roots Case Study

The Issue:

A retired individual experiencing severe mental health decline following a family relationship breakdown became socially isolated after hospital discharge. Despite living in the UK since the 1960s, he had limited community connections and support networks, leading to an increased risk of mental health crisis and readmission.

The Solution:

Introduction to SIG Penrose Roots' green social prescribing programme, specifically:

- Regular attendance at Roots to Recovery Garden for hands-on gardening activities
- Weekly participation in Connects social groups
- Access to woodland walks and natural spaces
- Integration into a supportive community environment

Benefits:

- Significant improvement in mental health and wellbeing
- Reduction in social isolation
- Development of meaningful friendships and community connections
- Improved sense of purpose and belonging
- Prevention of potential hospital readmission
- Regular physical activity through gardening and walking

Key Learnings and Considerations:

1. *Integration Time*

- Allow participants to engage at their own pace
- Provide mixed activities (gardening, social groups, walks) to suit different comfort levels
- Ensure consistent, reliable service provision to build trust

2. *Community Impact*

- Green social prescribing can help people develop genuine community connections
- Natural environments provide neutral, non-clinical spaces for relationship-building
- Successful engagement can lead to positive ripple effects (e.g. participant's subsequent donation to service)

3. *Service Design*

- Combine outdoor activities with indoor social spaces
- Offer year-round engagement opportunities
- Create flexible attendance options to maintain engagement across seasons

4. *Sustainability*

- Green activities provide dual benefits for environmental and mental health
- Community gardens offer a sustainable model for ongoing engagement
- Natural settings facilitate organic social connections

For healthcare workers considering similar approaches, this case demonstrates the value of long-term, flexible engagement combining environmental activities with social support. The key is creating accessible entry points while maintaining consistent, reliable service provision.