

Green Prescribing & Health Creation

The SPACE Project

Social prescribing & Civic Engagement

It's good for people and the planet



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Co-funded by
the European Union



PROJECT PARTNERSHIP



Your thoughts please

What do we mean by green (social) prescribing?

What does it look like?



Green prescribing



Green prescribing is the practice of supporting people to engage in nature-based interventions and activities to improve their mental and physical health, serving as a **non-clinical, community-based approach to health creation and disease management**.

It functions as a frontier in modern healthcare by shifting focus from solely treating illness to proactively **fostering wellbeing and tackling the root causes of ill health**.

It articulates **personalised care** by shifting the focus from a purely medical model to a holistic, **biopsychosocial approach that centres on an individual's unique needs, strengths, and preferences; creating a focus on what matters to you not what's the matter with you**.

Khoo Teck Puat Hospital Singapore



Volunteering = health and happiness

Health creating behaviour

Not just a rewarding thing to do, it can really benefit your health!

Lowers chronic inflammation & cholesterol

It has been scientifically proven that 'doing good' can give someone a heightened sense of wellbeing, a stronger immune system and much, much more.

Dr Edith Chen Northwestern University USA-research -cohort study including 1379 Black adolescents from 2 separate studies, those who volunteered, and who volunteered more frequently, had fewer indications of metabolic syndrome; higher purpose in life statistically mediated this association. Also, Black adolescents who volunteered had **reduced odds of diabetes in adulthood**.

Just 2 hours a week linked to longevity but only if about altruism!

INNOVATION OF SPACE

- Green social prescribing through volunteering in green space is formally part of health policies in only a few countries in Europe and UK development needs to be protected and extended..
- Its potential for people recovering from cancer is as yet untested as a specific beneficiary group in a pan-European and Uk test bed.
- SPACE complements the other initiatives already carried out by the participating organisations.
- The proposal brings added value at the EU/UK level through results that would not be attained by activities carried out in a single country.



VOLUNTEERING

The SPACE project highlights the role of volunteering in green social prescribing, where individuals are referred to community activities to improve their health and wellbeing and participate in shaping their own health.

The informal nature of volunteering helps people to engage and empower people who might otherwise feel that they “don’t fit” or might feel they will struggle to succeed in other contexts.

People who are referred to voluntary organisations to improve their health and wellbeing, when their issues are resolved, frequently become volunteers themselves to help other people facing similar issues. So green prescribing has huge potential to promote nature connectedness and pro-environmental behaviour.

RE-IMAGINING HEALTH AND CANCER CARE

Through **green and social prescribing**, the SPACE project offers an opportunity to support people rebuilding their lives after life-changing treatment, whilst also helping us rethink prevention, workforce education & sustainability.



More Information
space-eu.eu



The SPACE model **combines the benefits** of:

SOCIAL PRESCRIBING

Connecting people with community based activities, groups and services that **improve their health & wellbeing**

VOLUNTEERING

Providing opportunities for people to **exercise agency and purpose**

COMMUNITY GARDENING

A type of green social prescribing, with health outcomes that include **reductions in depression, help with pain management , reductions in anxiety, and loneliness**



Reality check?

What are the odds of getting cancer in 2026?

And where are we seeing most increases?

What percentage of GP appointments are not about clinical need?

And

How is the healthcare system contributing to the Climate Crisis?



Global emergencies



‘Cancer has emerged as one of humanity's most significant health challenges, affecting every nation on earth regardless of wealth or healthcare sophistication.’

Cancer constitutes one of the most urgent global health crises, with over **20 million new cases** diagnosed annually worldwide, claiming **10 million lives**

More than **1 billion people worldwide live with a mental health** condition. One in seven young people. 70% increase 15-19 yr olds since 2019.

The climate crisis is a public health crisis. We all know how climate change affects our planet, but it also having a devastating impact on our health – particularly the health of our most vulnerable populations.

What the evidence tells us about living in nature depleted areas

Health outcomes

Anxiety Disorders

44% increase

Cancer

10% increase

Childhood obesity

15% increase

Coronary heart disease

27% increase

Depression

33% increase

Immune system functioning

28% decrease

Upper respiratory tract infection

24% increase

Diabetes mellitus

25% increase

Our Civic Agenda-ABCs

Action & Advocacy

Mobilising public and political support through championing & evidencing value - green prescribing and volunteering

Bridging the gap between a community's need and the policies and systems that govern then to make **Change happen** and impacting on **Cancer** plans

Cross sector stakeholder intersections

Bridging the gap in education and training to enable people to see the possibilities and harness them.

Collaborative practice.

Practice what we preach.

Need to address Nature Deficit Disorder

Dr Ming Kuo

‘spending time in nature has profoundly positive and long-lasting effects on our psychological, physical, and social health.’

Vitamin G the solution.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The project was developed with the aim of building capacities in the health and voluntary sectors to offer Social prescribing in Urban Gardens. Based on research and our own observations, Social Prescribing can be a useful tool in a holistic approach to rehabilitation,, particularly in the context of recovery from cancer.



Co-produce with interested stakeholders a suitable approach for implementing and integrating volunteering as part of Social Prescribing.



Raise the capacity and confidence of health, social care and rehabilitation professionals as well as CSO/ NGO staff and volunteers to engage with the Social Prescribing programme in the context of volunteering.



Increase the interest and awareness of the value of volunteering in Urban/Community gardens as part of Social Prescribing schemes, especially for people with or recovering from cancer.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES

RESEARCH

Desk research on the current situation of Social Prescribing across Europe, Focus Groups with stakeholders, European-wide Survey

TRAININGS

Develop and pilot the initial training materials for health, social care and rehabilitation practitioners and volunteer managers

SPACE QUALITY LABEL

Develop a SPACE Quality Label for organisations, and set the criteria for the SPACE awards giving recognition to successful implementation of Social Prescribing

EVENTS

5 Community of Practice events, 8 Information Sessions, 5 Local sustainability events, 1 international conference

December 2024 -2027 work package 2

Scoping review of the literature

Desk Research on national and European contexts (January 2025 - June 2025)

Organisation of the Focus Groups (February 2025 - May 2025) (involving 80 participants, 10 per partner)

European survey to 1,500 practitioners

Creation of the State-of-the-Art Report (June 2025)

UK – working with NASP and developing partnership with Centre for Sustainable Healthcare-important focus on sustainability agenda.

Journey so far

Key deliverables for work package 2

- Developing a **common understanding and concepts of social prescribing through volunteering**
- **Development and piloting of materials to provide a comprehensive approach to** train health, social care, rehabilitation professionals, as well as Civic Society Organisations-employees and volunteers.
Information collection of evidence to be able to draw conclusions on effectiveness
- **Advocacy and sustainability package: dissemination events.**

Work package 3

- Development and piloting online materials
- Information collection of evidence to be able to draw conclusions on effectiveness
- Testing materials/resources by involving 125 cancer patients (recovering), 30 health, social care and rehabilitation professionals, CSO and volunteers, 10 health, social care and rehabilitation and volunteering institutions in 5 different countries.
- Prepare a policy brief aimed at education and training, civic engagement, EU and UK values and health policy makers
- Quantitative and qualitative evaluation.

Work package 4-get involved-

How can we work together?

- Advocacy and sustainability runs through everything
- Initial, mid term face to face meetings and an international policy conference
- Involvement of partners and additional interested stakeholders at all stages
- International policy conference for interested parties such as member state policy makers and their representatives also related ministeries
- Dissemination through traditional and social media channels
- Constant review and iteration of training material
- Wide Access to the training materials and results... And ??????????

Advocacy

Joining up agendas by understanding what matters to key stakeholders and building connections

1. Zero carbon and healthcare-sustainability
2. Polypharmacy and opioids – allies in plain sight
3. Radiotherapists and concern to reduce treatment sessions-As Low As Reasonably Achievable to reduce long-term toxicity

Harvest unintended consequences

VITAMIN D new resource. Thanks to Dr Hanaa Mousa !!

Making the case –some resources for consideration

Just some resources to explore and refer back to, with references to encourage further exploration.

Not going into any detail just to whet your appetite !

The powerpoint will be shared with notes.

Imagine opportunity

Benefits

Mood Elevation & Reduced Anxiety

Enhanced stress resilience & improved cognition

Immune system modulation

Huge body of evidence

A [UK study](#) in 2019 , involving nearly 20,000 people, found that those who **spent at least a total of 120 minutes every week in green spaces** were **significantly more likely to report good health and higher psychological wellbeing**.

A [study](#) found that people in a hotel room for three days who were **breathing in Hinoki (Japanese cypress) oil** saw a big **drop in the adrenaline hormone** and a **large increase** in natural killer cells in their blood. The participants in the study still had elevated natural killer cells in their body two weeks after inhaling the smell.

Ulrich - groundbreaking study 1984

- **Length of stay** Patients who had a view of trees through a window recovered faster than those who faced a brick wall.
- **Medication usage** During the critical post-surgery period (days 2–5), tree-view patients received significantly fewer moderate and strong doses of pain relief than wall-view patients, indicating less perceived pain and discomfort.
- **Nurses' observational notes** Nurses recorded more positive comments for patients with tree views and fewer negative comments compared to those facing the brick wall, showing a significant emotional and mood-related difference between the two groups.



We can influence recovery by good design that lets nature in

Ulrich's study concluded that natural views significantly improved recovery outcomes by reducing the length of hospitalisation, decreasing the use of strong pain medications, and positively influencing mood and behaviour as observed by nurses.

The dirt vaccine & hygiene hypothesis



Professor John Stanford argued the immune system is a learning device that requires data from its environment to mature, particularly in early childhood. Humans have co-evolved with microbes found in dirt, mud, water, and animals. These organisms (bacteria, helminths) teach the immune system to tolerate harmless substances.

When these "old friends" are absent, the immune system doesn't learn how to "calm down," resulting in a "trigger-happy" system that overreacts to harmless substances (allergies) or attacks the body (autoimmunity).

Reduced exposure to these microbes reduces the production of regulatory T cells (Tregs), which are crucial for suppressing unnecessary inflammation.

A nature deficits is fuelling ill health.



Environment and genes

Genes are not destiny; they are a blueprint, with environment and lifestyle holding up to 70-85% influence over health outcomes.

Epigenetics-how our environment, daily choices like diet, exercise, stress management, and sleep can activate or suppress gene expression, meaning inherited risks can be managed or bypassed. These factors can turn bad genes on and good genes off.

People living in Green Areas seem to age slower at the cellular level-
the greener space you have access to the longer your telomere.

Genes aren't destiny

Genomics

The study of the genes in our DNA (molecular instruction manual), their functions and their influence on the growth, development and working of the body.

Telomeres-Protective cap at the end of a tail on a chromosome - telomere length shortens with age. Telomere length may serve as a biological clock to determine the lifespan of a cell and an organism and a predictor of disease development.

Being in nature can lengthen telomeres in just 6 weeks.

Forest bathing

It has been well reported that forest environments have the following beneficial effects on human health as they

1. Release **natural compounds which enhance human immune function, reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and increase natural killer cells (NKC)**
2. Increase **human natural killer (NK) activity**, the number of NK cells, and the intracellular levels of anti-cancer proteins, suggesting a preventive/protection effect on cancers.
3. Increase the activity of parasympathetic nerves and reduce the activity of sympathetic nerves.
4. In the Profile of Mood States (POMS) test, reduce the scores for anxiety, depression, anger, fatigue, and confusion, and increase the score for vigour, showing psychological effects as well.



Hormones matter too

Spending time outdoors triggers our endocrine system which regulates vital bodily functions, maintaining homeostasis, whilst lowering levels of cortisol and adrenaline - the hormones that surge when you are stressed or anxious. And the system boosts feel-good neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine.

Adrenalin and cortisol are not inherently "bad," but they are harmful when **chronic stress** keeps them elevated long-term. While designed for short-term survival (fight-or-flight), constantly high levels, break down the body, causing chronic inflammation, heart disease, weight gain, weakened immunity, and severe fatigue.

How can green prescribing help support cancer rehabilitation and boost prevention opportunity?

Do you want to join the conversation?
Be involved in a community of practice and receive updates?

Thank you for listening, contributing and do stay in touch!

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Social Prescribing and Civic Engagement (SPACE)



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