CultureCase

Prescribe art and nature to improve wellbeing

This research was conducted by **Linda Thomson** and **three others** at **University College London** and the **University of Leicester**

Summary

This paper describes the findings from an evaluation of a ‘creative green prescription’ programme held at Whitworth Park and the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester. Participation in the programme was shown to result in increased feelings of wellbeing brought about by improved self-esteem, decreased social isolation and the formation of communities of practice.

Participants gave themselves a wellbeing score before and after the programme using the UCL Museum Wellbeing Measure

These scores were supplemented by semi-structured interviews and diaries from participants and project facilitators. The data came from 46 adult mental health service users aged between 44 and 70 who were referred to the programme through social prescribing. No single participant attended all 10 weeks of the scheme.

The sessions took place indoors and outdoors

A typical hour-long indoor session started with a 15 minute briefing prior to group work, with a 15 minute break halfway through, followed by more group or individual work (talks, demonstrations, object handling and making art). Outdoor sessions comprised practical demonstrations followed by hands-on activities (using and maintaining garden tools).

Museums with parks and gardens should consider integrating outdoor and indoor programming

Social prescribing is becoming increasingly common – partly in recognition of the fact that non-medical causes of ill health can be addressed by non-medical interventions. Arts activities and being outdoors in nature have both developed as aspects of social prescribing. Combining art and nature activities may amplify the benefits of each. In this instance the authors acknowledge that small sample size and lack of a ‘control group’ are limitations in their study.

Keywords

social prescribing **museum** **art** **UK** **mental health** **horticulture**

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