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London Wildlife Trust and East London NHS Foundation Trust Collaborate on Nature-Inspired Wellbeing Programme for Young People

Nature in Mind is an innovative two-year pilot programme providing nature-based wellbeing workshops for young people referred to the Newham Multi-Agency Collective. This is a new partnership project between London Wildlife Trust and East London NHS Foundation Trust, facilitated through Newham Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

Workshops are delivered at the Trust's Walthamstow Wetlands Nature Reserve. They provide a safe, inclusive, and friendly space for young people to nurture their mental health through a variety of outdoor activities. These include wildlife identification, sensory activities, wellbeing walks, practical conservation, creative arts, bushcraft, and hands-on exploration of different habitats.

The initiative aims to showcase the recognised positive impact of being in nature on mental health: Such as reducing anxiety and stress, improving mood, aiding sensory and emotional regulation, enhancing concentration, and inspiring creativity.

Nature in Mind works to address the critical need to support young people on mental health service waiting lists. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a 30% increase in referrals and complexity for Newham CAMHS, resulting in extended waiting times. The project focuses on assisting those on low-risk 'green pathways'. This includes young people experiencing anxiety, panic attacks, depression, difficulties socialising and those seeking diagnosis or treatment for Autistic Spectrum Conditions or ADHD. It also includes young people who find it difficult to attend school for emotional reasons or those who are struggling with their memories of traumatic or difficult experiences.

Newham CAMHS serves a London Borough facing multiple deprivations, including limited green space and is the second lowest for tree cover in London. It has a highly diverse population, with ethnicity and stigma adding barriers to accessing green space alongside mental health support. By facilitating nature-space workshops, this programme aims to help young people to 'Wait Well' and leverage the therapeutic link between nature connectedness and improved mental health. When the CAMHS team discuss a new referral, this option could be one of the options offered to the young person while they wait for an appointment or if they do not meet the threshold for a CAMHS intervention.

Beyond the immediate support, this project has the potential to shape the future provision of sustainable services by highlighting the role of nature in mental health. This aligns with the Greener NHS initiative, promoting mental wellbeing, encouraging staff retention, and contributing to the fight against climate change. The collaboration between the Trust and Newham CAMHS not only seeks to provide vital mental health support but also serves as a model for integrating nature into healthcare practices.

Leah McNally, Director of Learning, Youth & Communities at London Wildlife Trust said: *“London Wildlife Trust is proud to be working in partnership with the East London NHS Trust to deliver our new social-prescribing initiative. The programme aims to introduce children and young people to the wellbeing benefits of accessing nature and greenspaces in our city. We know that nature has a positive effect on mental health; we hope to inspire children and young people to restore their connection with nature and help them to create a long-standing interest in our natural world.”*

Dr Alexia Haysom, Higher Trainee in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, East London NHS Foundation Trust said: *“Nature can and should be a core companion in treating mental health difficulties, but it is often overlooked to the detriment of us all and our planet. This project is such an exciting partnership, offering healing and connectedness to children and young people who desperately need it. I hope there will be many more projects just like this in the near future!”*

Fiona Stockley, General Manager of the Newham CAMHS team said, *“The workshops are a really welcome space for young people to explore their interests and learn new things. It provides a relaxed setting for them to talk to others to support their wellbeing.”*

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NOTES TO EDITOR

Nature in Mind is a partnership project between London Wildlife Trust and East London NHS Foundation Trust, facilitated through Newham CAMHS. When the CAMHS team discuss a new referral, the Nature in Mind pathway could be one of the options offered to the young person while they wait for an appointment or if they do not meet the threshold for a CAMHS intervention.

About London Wildlife Trust

Founded in 1981, the Trust manages 36 free-to-access nature reserves across the capital. We engage with London's diverse communities through practical land management, campaigning, volunteering, and education to give London's wildlife a voice.

We work with many partners to advocate for a city richer in biodiversity and ecological resilience, through policy, planning and best practice. The Trust is one of 46 Wildlife Trusts working across the UK, with the support of over with more than 900,000 members and 39,000 volunteers, to help nature recover and make it a part of life, for everyone.

wildlondon.org.uk

About East London NHS Foundation Trust

East London NHS Foundation Trust provides mental health and community health services in East London, Bedfordshire and Luton. It provides forensic mental health services to the whole of North East London. ELFT has a workforce of 6,500 staff and provides services from over 100 sites. The Trust is recognised as a centre of excellence for innovation and improvement. The Trust has been rated Outstanding by the Care Quality Commission three times in 2016, 2018, and again in January 2022.

About CAMHS

Newham Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service assesses and treats children and young people (under 18) with mental health problems and their families. The teams include Psychiatrists, Psychotherapists, Psychologists, Family Therapists and Community Mental Health Nurses trained to work with children, young people and their families.

References

A Natural Health Service, report by The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts
<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/23JUN Health Report Summary FINAL.pdf>

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