

Researching the Benefits of Green Care



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What is Green Care?

- How does it work?
- How does it fit with health and social care systems and processes?
- What does it set out to do?
- What is it achieving?
- For whom?



Green Care

Care
Farming

Social
and
Therapeutic
Horticulture
SHT

Animal
Assisted
Therapy
AAT

Other nature-
related
therapies?
Onotherapy?

Range of different contexts, activities, health benefits,
clients, motivations and needs.

So much variety.....

- **Activities**
 - Farming activities, animal care, horticulture, specific therapy activities, exposure to nature and more
- **Clients/ participants/ patients/ volunteers**
 - Mental health, psychiatric patients, social service clients, depression, bi-polar disorder, dementia, Alzheimer's, autism, stress, children, disaffected youth, elderly, drug/alcohol rehab., M.E., physical disability, burn-out, probation and more
- **Benefits** (related to needs and motivation)
 - Health, well-being, specific therapeutic goals, social skills, security, natural rhythms, education, skills, work training, quality of life and more
- **Contexts**
 - Farms, horticultural gardens, healing gardens, hospitals, residential, non-residential, therapeutic communities, day care facilities and more

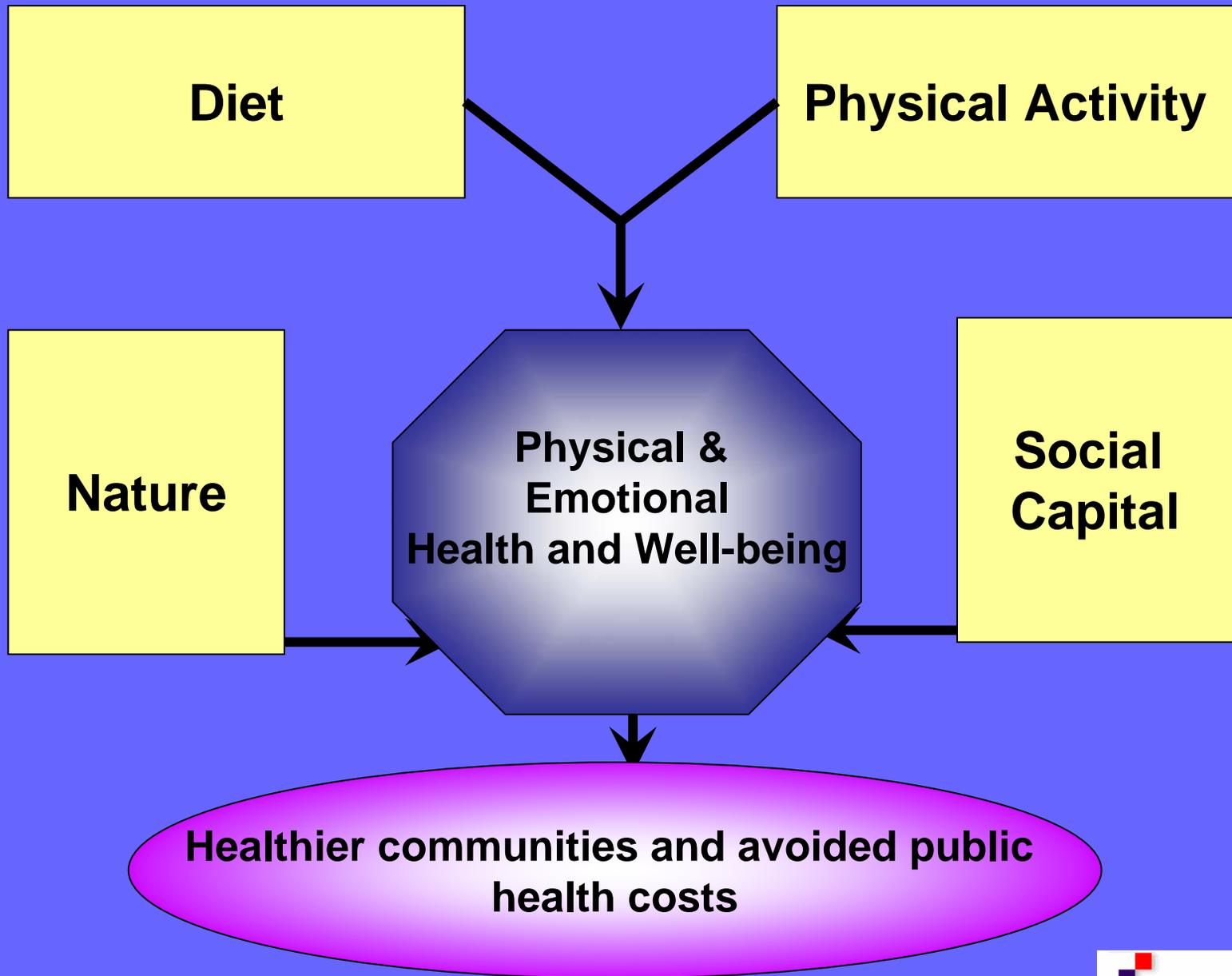
Challenge for Working Group 1

- Overview of current research into health and well-being benefits of green care in Europe
- Consensus amongst green care researchers
- Promote high quality, scientifically robust and comparable methodologies for assessing health benefits of green care
- Theoretical concepts, frameworks and models for green care
- Next steps

From Green Exercise to Green Care:

Recent University of Essex research findings,
care farming in the UK and the development of the
National Care farming Initiative (UK)





Influence of Diet

- Nutrition transition
- Large increase in diet-related chronic diseases in adults (and now in children)



Physical Activity

- Dramatic fall in physical activity levels in past 50 years
- More sedentary lifestyles – both work and leisure time



Influence of Nature

- The Biophilia Hypothesis: Closeness to nature increases well-being
- Nature makes positive contributions to our health and is an important resource for human health



Social Capital

- Healthy communities have higher levels of social capital
- Outdoor places also provide great opportunities for people to connect to each other as well as to nature



The Concept of “Green Exercise”

Physical Activity

Known to have positive effects on physical and mental health

Exposure to Nature

Known to have positive effects on mental health

Green Exercise

To what extent does physical activity in the presence of green space affect mental and physical well-being?



Three Levels of Engagement with Nature



1. Viewing nature

- Through a window or in a painting or photograph



2. Incidental exposure to nearby nature

- Walking or cycling to work / sitting in garden or park



3. Active participation

- Gardening, farming, trekking, camping, cross-country running and walking, horse-riding, fishing etc
- Care farming
- Limited research evidence in the UK
- Much qualitative data



Viewing Nature

University of Essex study

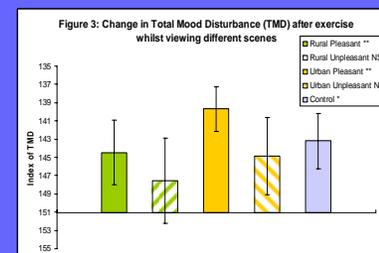
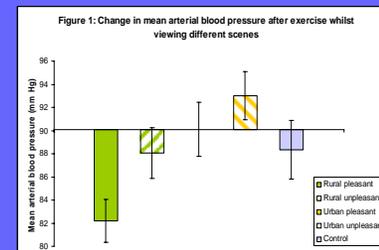
- Controlled conditions
- 100 subjects
- Tested pre and post exercise
- Comparison of 4 types of views while exercising on treadmill for 20 minutes
- Observed either rural pleasant, rural unpleasant, urban pleasant, urban unpleasant or no pictures (control)

Measured two effects

- Of difference scenes
- Of physical activity

Results

- Exercise alone significantly reduced blood pressure, increased self-esteem and improved 4 of 6 mood measures
- However both rural and urban pleasant generated a significantly *greater positive affect* on self esteem etc
- By contrast both rural and urban unpleasant scenes *reduced* the positive effects of exercise on self-esteem



Active Participation

University of Essex study (supported by the Countryside Recreation Network)

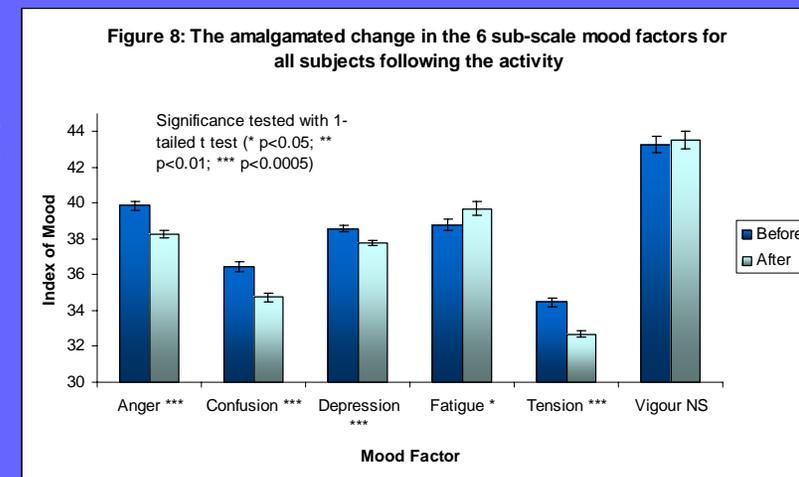
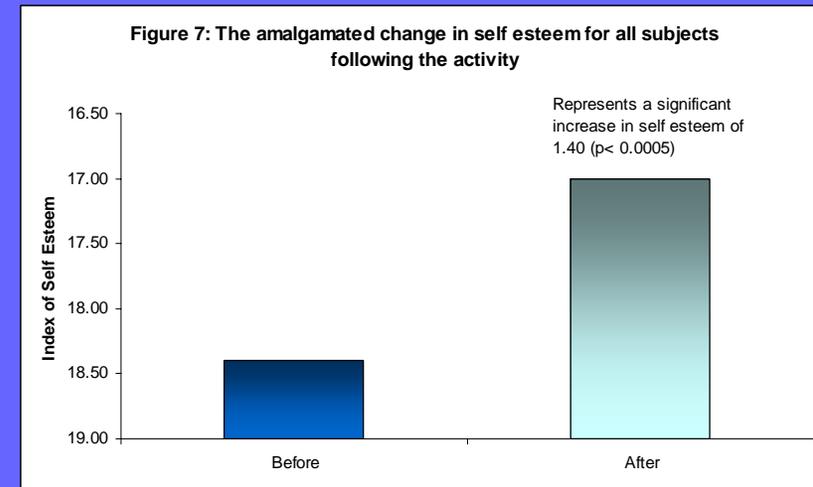
Remit:

- Identify 10 case studies of various green exercise activities
- Analyse health benefits derived from participation in “Green exercise”
 - Examined: different types of activity, different levels of intensity and duration, different types of habitat, a geographical spread, group and individual activities, organised or informal sessions



Key Mental Health Findings

- Mood and Self-esteem
 - Significant increase in self esteem
 - Significant reduction in anger, confusion, depression and tension
 - No significant differences in the improvements to self esteem and mood, between the 10 activities
- Self-esteem and mood are improved by gentle as well as vigorous exercise
- No differences between long and short visits to greenspaces
- Cannot separate out benefits from green exercise and from social capital
- Significant health and wellbeing dividend from a wide range of Green Exercise activities



From Green Exercise to Green Care



- Repeating laboratory study of views but with cardiac rehabilitation patients
- Working with MIND collecting new data to launch at their annual Mind week in May 2007
- Working with a local mental health partnership trust to compare green exercise and CBT as treatment options for patients suffering from mild-moderate depression
- Working with a wilderness foundation assessing the mental health benefits and connectedness to nature during wilderness excursions
- Evaluating the impact of environmental volunteering on behaviours, attitudes to the environment and connectedness to nature
- Care Farming – the use of farms and agricultural landscapes for the promotion of physical health and mental well-being

Psychological benefits of nature

- Benefits from nearby nature and wilderness alike
- Evidence should not be a surprise
 - Yet it does not form a part of health or planning agenda
 - Also not part of food and agriculture agenda
- Frumkin (2001): *“hospitals have traditionally had gardens as an adjunct to recuperation and healing”*
- Ulrich (1984): *“one of the most clear cut findings in the literature is the consistent tendency to prefer natural scenes over built views, especially when the latter lack vegetation and water”*.



A new model for farms: for a new era?

Multifunctionality:

- Food
- Wildlife
- Landscape aesthetics
- Carbon sequestration
- Health services
- Flood protection
- Clean water
- Social capital
- Income generation
- Genetic material
- Historic features



What is Care Farming?

– the NCFI(UK) context

- Green Care or care farming is the utilisation of agricultural farms as a base for promoting human mental and physical health - combining productive farming with elements of health & social care
- Animals, crops, gardens, woodlands and the landscape are used in work related activities for a range of participants
- Psychiatric patients; people with learning difficulties; those suffering from depression, burnout problems or drug or alcohol problems; the elderly, disaffected youth and social service clients.
- The health sector and social services need alternatives to traditional medical treatment, therapy and work training
- Farmers are paid for providing a kind of “health service” whilst continuing with agriculture, can help to maintain economic viability of farms, benefit from extra labour, can still sell produce etc

National Care Farming Initiative (UK)

- Promote and support the expansion of care farming throughout the UK
- Development of a National Care Farming Network
- Monthly Email newsletter
- Build up evidence base – Stage 1 Research
- Provide a vehicle for consultation, identify barriers to delivery, and engage all stakeholders in formulating a strategic programme
- Employment of a Project Officer to help develop and promote strategic framework.
- 2nd Care Farming Conference March 27th 2007



Thank you

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