

Name: Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society

SECTION 11- Discussion Questions and Process

11.2 Three key questions:

Question 1:

What shared objectives and actions for local delivery should be made for 2008-11 that would be deliverable, measurable and valuable?

'Toward a mentally Flourishing Scotland' wants to improve mental health, tackle health, social and economic inequalities, prevent, treat and care for mental illness and improve the quality of life for people with mental illness.

Gardening promotes health and a sense of well-being. It is both a creative and a social activity, where people can gain skills, exercise and work in a peaceful, natural environment. Allotments also support friendships and social net-works. However many people, particularly from deprived areas do not have the opportunity to garden.

Evidence from recent documents on the wellscotland website shows that physical exercise and contact with nature have positive impacts on depression and other health problems, such as anxiety, phobia, panic attacks, stress and as an adjunct to treatment in the management of symptoms of schizophrenia. However gardening which brings together both these areas only mentioned briefly in any of the papers.

There are a few health projects which involve gardening in Scotland among them the Healthy Living Bute, Healthy Roots in Aberdeen and the Bridgend Community Allotment Health Project, a partnership project between NHS Lothian and the City of Edinburgh Council's Parks Unit but these are not part of mainstream health referrals.

We suggest that

- all Health Boards work with their local Councils to set up and fund at least one Community Allotment Health Project in their area
- that the Warwick Edinburgh Well Being Scale is used to evaluate the benefits of gardening
- that gardening is marketed as a health benefit by the Scottish Government in the same way as diet and walking.

Question 2:

What national supports would help you to meet these objectives and actions?

Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society is campaigning for the benefits of gardening to be recognized at Scottish Government, local authority and community levels.

We ask that

- the Scottish Government sets up a working group to write a strategy and action plan for gardening in Scotland that would be implemented by local authorities, health boards, community organisations and private bodies.
- Healthier Scotland and the Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health work with us and other organisations representing amateur and professional gardeners to promote the understanding among health professionals at all levels that gardening is a cost effective tool in the management of mental health.

Question 3

How can progress be tracked and performance assessed?

Growth in the number of

- (i) Community Health and Social Care partnerships that establish links with local allotment sites
- (ii) schools programmes where children learn to garden
- (iii) research projects evaluating the benefits of gardening, in prevention and therapy for mental health. The value of combining physical activity, contact with nature and social support networks.