**Title**  Participation in an allotment group: exploring influences on well-being

**Abstract**

**Background**
Evidence for the social and therapeutic benefits of allotment gardening, and as a medium for occupational therapy, though well-documented is often anecdotal, particularly in the Irish context. In a climate of budget cuts to health services, this study seeks to explore how participation in an allotment group facilitated through a mental health service influences the well-being of those involved.

**Objectives**
To gain an understanding of how allotment participation influences well-being for participants (gardeners and facilitators).

**Methods**
A case study approach was undertaken with an Irish rural allotment group facilitated by occupational therapists in a mental health service. In-depth interviews were completed with participants. Participant observation was used to assess the influence of tacit aspects of group involvement. Interview transcripts, field-notes and key documents were thematically analysed to clarify emergent themes.

**Findings**
Findings indicate that allotment group participation has a positive influence on well-being for gardeners and facilitators. This influence was attributed to the group ethos, tasks and environment of the allotment. Also emergent from the data were three mechanisms of influence relating to promoting positive coping, facilitating change, and providing opportunities for developing new skills.

**Conclusions**
Findings of this study indicate a positive influence of allotment participation, in line with previous research on gardening as a meaningful occupation. These may serve as an initial evidence base on which to build innovative and member-led horticultural interventions in mental health occupational therapy services. Further research may address member issues and voices, and the influence of facilitating an allotment on professional practice.
Introduction
The impetus for this study occurred when occupational therapists in an Irish mental health service noted anecdotally the influence of the service’s weekly allotment group on participants’ well-being. The allotment group had been established to support participants to gain skills and promote recovery. A body of international evidence for the use of allotment gardening, as well as a perceived fit with the people using the service, made the group a clear choice for the service to implement. It was facilitated in the community, away from the hospital setting, on two sites; one with an allotment and one with a poly-tunnel. The group aimed to and informally reported promoting healthy living approach through outdoor exercise and harvesting of vegetables.

However, there is little research to support mental health occupational therapy in an Irish setting (O’Connell and McKay 2010), let alone allotment use facilitated by occupational therapists. Moreover, recent findings suggest occupational therapists in mental health settings report difficulty in producing convincing evidence of their unique contribution to health care (Casteleijn and Graham 2012) and as such more evidence is needed (Mee et al 2004; Mee and Sumson 2001) on the benefits of occupational therapy for people with mental ill-health.

This search for evidence for anecdotally successful, member-led and cost effective occupational therapy groups is especially relevant in the current climate of “very significant budgetary challenges” (HSE 2013, p.5) to the Health Service Executive (HSE) of Ireland. It is also in line with HSE strategy (HSE 2013, p5) and current legislation such as the Mental Health Act (Government of Ireland 2001) and the strategy document A Vision for Change (Department of Health and Children 2006).

Considering such factors, the occupational therapists involved in the allotment sought qualitative research collaboration to explore the influence of participation in the weekly allotment group on well-being of those involved. This study aimed to provide information on this occupational therapy programme and its contribution to mental health recovery, by describing the allotment programme and its influence on the well-being of those involved.

Literature Review
A literature review was conducted using search terms related to the research question for papers in occupational therapy and horticulture journals from the last 25 years. Regarding well-being, concepts from previous research included: a state of pursuing personal aspirations and being capable of engaging in daily life, while experiencing equality, interdependence and mutual recognition with others (Hay et al
1993). Other aspects from the research identified were happiness, a sense of growth, a transcendence of the limitations of the body, space, time and circumstances, social and mental health, belonging, and a feeling of being at peace with one’s self and others, often through meaningful occupation (Wilcock 2006; Johnson and Schmidt 1983). Other literature reviewed the effect of cultural context, on mental health and well-being (Aguis 1993). As such, it is noted that this study was completed in Ireland with many values based on Western assumptions. An environmental effect on mental health and well-being is recognised by research (Tudor 1996; Fernando 1993). Research (Pretty et al 2007; Pretty et al 2005) showed that viewing images of nature can improve the effect of exercise on well-being, even if indoors. It was also found that nature’s effect on well-being was immediately increased when exercise happened outdoors.

A recent review of evidence on the use of gardening as an occupation has demonstrated it’s multifacteted potential to promote well-being through the aspects outlined above as well as other social aspects (York and Wiseman 2012). Fieldhouse’s (2003) study using focus groups of gardeners highlighted an allotment as a safe, stigma free and supportive place that held a wide range of benefits pertaining to social, cognitive and spiritual aspects of well-being. This was described as the allotments “affirming social milieu” (Fieldhouse 2003, p.292). Fieldhouse noted that the interplay of each aspect accentuated the benefits overall. A similar interplay was observed between community gardens, the promotion of physical exercise, and psychological well-being by Stein (2008). In terms of using gardening as a medium for occupational therapy, Frances (2006) reported that outdoor activities such as gardening are viable therapeutic medium for people with enduring mental health problems. Blair et al (2008) further suggested that gardening is an occupation that is the “totality of an enhancing activity” incorporating social contact, skill, exercise and involvement of culture, while creating opportunities for individual and community well-being (p.26).

Considerations regarding the optimum level of allotment group community integration are also described in the literature. Bates (2006) suggests that segregated groups may not support inclusion and coping in the community, while research by Nagle et al (2002) suggested an individually graded approach to integration is necessary to limit the person’s perceived risks of a relapse. In relation to addressing this issue, Diamant and Waterhouse (2010) reported the importance of the “just right” (Rebeiro 2001, p87), safe, graded environment in obtaining the benefits from engaging in social
Limitations found in the literature include a lack of research focus on therapeutic or social aspects of gardening, anecdotal, unreliable or ill-defined study designs that did not produce reliable results (York and Wiseman 2012; Sempik et al 2005; Johnson 1999). Further highlighted is the importance of conducting more qualitative studies in this field to unwrap and explore possible relationships involved (Newton 2007).

**Research question and aims**

In relation to the literature, the research question this study asks is “How does participation in an allotment group, facilitated through a mental health service, influence well-being?” The aim of this research was to explore understanding of the participants views of their experiences of allotment group participation through interview and to gain an understanding of other tacit elements of group participation through participant observation and reflective methods.

**Methodology**

To address the aims of the study, a flexible research question, qualitative methodology, ethnographic methods and case study approach were used. This facilitated investigation of the lived experience of people in a group with implicit rules and relationships, and the existing member-led approach of the group.

Qualitative methodology was used to explore the rich and complex emic, or insider, perspective of the people involved in the group (Taylor 2008; Denzin and Lincoln 2005). A case study approach was chosen to to achieve a clear and deep understanding of the phenomena at hand and capture an understanding of the many voices involved in the experience of group participation (Yin 2009). This approach is in line with Critical Theory (Angrosino 2007), which aims to challenge traditionally powerful institutions of society and research, and promote research participation collaboration. Ethnographic methods were used to further build accounts of the influences and processes of this kind of cultural context and knowledge that would aid their reader to gain experienced understanding of allotment group participation (Depoy and Gitlin 2005; Bailey 1997).

The research sites were an office in a mental health service and a nearby field site accessed through an agricultural property. Research methods included interviews, participant observation and reflective journaling. Individual interviews were conducted separately with each facilitator and gardener in the office setting to explore their views and experiences regarding the influence of gardening on well-
being, while addressing issues about confidentiality or speaking in front of others (MacDougall and Fudge 2001; Kitzinger 1995). Participant observation was employed on the allotment site itself where gardening is used as a medium for occupational therapy. The aim of this method was to explore tacit factors pertaining to the group of which participants may have not been aware or able to articulate (Depoy and Gitlin 2004; Mason 2002). This method sits well in triangulation with the other methods used, i.e. interviews and other documentation (Angrosino 2007). This method is considered to be less biased, invasive and scrutinising than direct observation, and contributed to clarifying the reflexive researcher role and allowing the authentic voices and experiences of the participants to be explored (Angrosino 2007; Emerson et al 2001). Field notes and reflective journaling were completed promptly after each research instance for reflexivity and bias awareness (Gitlin and De Poy 2005).

For this study, purposive sample was used, to make best use of limited time and resources. This involved using a gatekeeper, to identify people who were in the best available position to help answer the study’s research question (Hammell and Carpenter 2004). The gatekeeper recruited people through mail or face-to-face contact using an information sheet. The researcher then contacted each participant and arranged an interview time convenient to them. Data collected for this study included transcripts from interviews with participants and researchers field-notes from participant observation. Reflective material from the researcher’s journal was also collected. Before data collection commenced, a single adult pilot interview was conducted. This resulted in a simplification of the language on the interview sheet, a reordering of questions to achieve a better flow, and rephrasing of questions to ensure the data obtained was relevant to the research question.

Thematic analysis was completed using steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Analysis consisted of the first author reading all the data twice, making note of initial codes by hand, exploring initial themes through concept mapping and NVivo2 qualitative data analysis software (QSR International 2002). Themes were then reviewed through Nvivo and through discussion and visual analysis with the research supervisor. This reconfigured and recontextualised themes to be valid and more flowing. Themes were then finalised to include extracts corresponding to emergent themes from each data source. This enabled the researcher to report quotes that reflected the overall accounts reported by participants.
This study aimed to address the four markers of trustworthiness in qualitative research outlined by Krefting (2001). In terms of credibility, the study aimed to represent a recognisable picture of the people’s experiences through capturing personal experience in interviews and through attending the group over a prolonged period and repeated visits. This was supported through a member check, with a 50% response rate, all of whom agreed with findings. Transferability was addressed through comparing emergent themes with those reflected in previous research, and through giving a rich, thick and deep report of data in order to allow others to assess goodness of fit with other contexts. Strategies to address dependability and confirmability involved giving a clear account of the research conducted through review by supervisor and inclusion of reports of negative effect around stigma and conflicting ideas for group progression. Discussion with the research supervisor and the researcher’s use of a reflective model (Gibbs 1988)) assisted with the placement of the findings in the research and supported boundary maintenance.

Regarding ethical considerations of this study, HSE ethics board approval was granted by the region in which this study was conducted. As participant observation was a major source of data collection and context for the study it was vital to address the documented ethical issues associated with this method. Issues of perceived duplicity and role blurring for the researcher between the emic and etic perspectives (Mason 2002) were addressed through using overt participant observation in which all gardeners and facilitators were aware of the information and experience gathering role of the researcher. This reflexivity and transparency was further assisted by the researcher completing reflective journal entries and field notes promptly after sessions to address bias. These sessions took place during the officially scheduled weekly allotment times.

Potential power issues were explored regarding the involvement of the facilitator of the group as they held roles as a gatekeeper for gardener and facilitator participation and as a participant in the current study. These were addressed by continually seeking consent from all participants throughout the process, and ensuring, through repeated verbal checks, that participants were empowered to withdraw without repercussion throughout the research process. Any potential issues of identifying a person’s contribution will be lessened through the use of individual interviews and pseudonyms (Angrosino 2007), as well as through the use of password protected data devices, data cleaning and the reporting of themes rather than specific identifiable instances.
Findings

Participants
There were six participants within this study: three men and three women, from any of the other nine grounds for equality (Office of the Attorney General 2000). All participants were involved with the allotment project in the past two years. Three were allotment group facilitators from the mental health service: two occupational therapists and one social worker. Three were gardeners from the allotment group who used the local mental health service. Exclusion criteria included concurrent use of in-patient psychiatric services both because of potential for confounding treatments, and for perceived vulnerabilities regarding consent. Also excluded were members who had not taken part in the group in the last two years and new members unaware of the study.

Themes
Interview transcripts, field-notes and participant observation field work sheets were analysed. Themes emerged regarding; the ethos of the group; the promotion of psychological and functional well-being; participation as facilitating change; and the provision of opportunities for skill development.

Influence
When commenting on the influence of the allotment group on well-being most facilitators referred to one particularly salient anecdote, after which:

“We just looked at each other and thought “that’s what this group is about”. It’s not just the coming together once a week for an hour with everyone working away but that knock on effect of how it feels afterwards.” – Kate, facilitator.

All gardeners reported agreement on this phenomenon. For example: “There’s contentment in it like …and confidence to go back and do it again maybe…there’s happiness in the success.”-David, gardener.

Theme: allotment group ethos
In terms of this influence a theme emerged around the group, particularly it’s person centred, member-led ethos. All participants referred to an empowering, supportive, positive, informal group dynamic where each member is valued and learning as an equal; “It’s about going back to that OT ethos of being client centred and seeing how
each person develops.” – William, facilitator. Gardeners experienced this as empowering, for example, Jane, a gardener commented; “you do need to plan it, like, but it’s not dictatorial. You know, somebody just wants a clippers and just goes…”.

This relaxed environment and focus on meaningful task based activities allowed for easy conversation that feels normal and natural or “just chit chat…a little bit about how they are doing. It’s a…team building thing we do as well, isn't it? “ - Vicky, gardener. All facilitators noticed this, for example; “It’s not about talking. It’s about the doing, and the feedback from the doing, and having you’re carrots and your onions.” - Kate, facilitator. As did gardeners:

“then what you find is, when you focus on the work someone will start telling you a bit about their mental health, when they feel comfortable enough, yeah, and if they don’t that’s fine you just respect that” - Vicky, gardener.

An additional motif regarding influence of group participation regarded the task of gardening. It was reported by all participants to be engaging and meaningful while also being gradable and inclusive to people of all levels of ability: “There might be a job to be done for which you’re in pain and not able, and you might say “Oh I’ll do this but I can’t do that”” - Vicky, gardener. Others reported “People could say “right, that's it” and go away and have their cigarette break… and come back”- Kate, facilitator. All gardeners noticed the experience of becoming completely engaged in tasks and experiencing time distortion and a relief from pain or negative thoughts. For example: “…you would get lost in the work, once you start a job, you just….finish it… the time goes quick alright” - Jane, gardener.

The community allotment situated in a country field was viewed as positively influencing well-being through being a natural environment that promoted community integration. For example: “the fresh air is the best thing ever for myself. I just think it’s fantastic… and it’s free” - Jane, gardener. While David, a gardener, noted: “they help you out if you want and... If I can help someone I’ll help someone – that would be a natural thing …like”. Other comments on the setting were that it was very remote and not near the group’s polly-tunnel, which they would use on rainy days.
Theme: promoting coping
The allotment was described as promoting both psychological and functional coping. In terms of psychological coping: Participation in the group was viewed positively as a tool for dealing with life:

“... it was a bit of escapism, but it was more impassioned... It's a kind of mindfulness, really, which I just love, even when I’m digging potatoes and stuff... It's a diversion- it's my main coping skill” - Vicky, gardener.

Participation was also viewed by all gardeners as a source of positive experiences that facilitated a sense of humour and enjoyment. For most participants it facilitated a change of outlook to appreciate process as well as product. It was seen by a majority of participants as a medium for spirituality, meaning and purpose, or connectedness to nature. Others saw it as affording a chance to see what you’re able to do, through the visual, concrete nature of the tasks. It was cited as providing satisfaction in work and life, and opportunities for feeling grateful or lucky. In terms of functional coping, group engagement was viewed as an organising influence in daily life that promoted time management and scheduling, as well as carryover of ability and motivation to manage into daily life. Moreover it was viewed as promoting insight into coping. For example:

“...when you come home you are more motivated, because when you work you feel good. If you do nothing all day, you're like “I'll do it at 3, I'll do it at 4” and you don’t do anything, but I used to come home from the allotment and I’d have a bit of a buzz, and be able to work, or do jobs in my own house. It's just continuous” - Jane, gardener.

Theme: facilitating change
All participants described how participation in the allotment group facilitated change in their professional and personal life. It was reported that allotment sessions remained fresh and new each time, and were never stale or by rote:

“...the anxiety management group - you’d have the bones of it kind of planned out all the time, whereas with the gardening group you kind of have to think of different things like ground covering.” – William, facilitator.

This freshness facilitated interest and personal growth through growing motivation and confidence: “It gave me an interest … and then I went on to FETEC level 3
myself as a separate thing. Since then I have done a few courses in the FETEC. So, definitely, it was great" - Jane, gardener. Allotment involvement was viewed as a way of redressing lifestyle balance and increasing outdoor activity: “and you feel so much better you know, even though it was annoying me digging it, but afterwards I felt better and physically, I am in better shape” – David, gardener. It was also viewed as a rebalancing of time; some viewed it as productive, while others perceived it as a holiday or break from other pressures.

**Theme: skill development**

All participants viewed continued engagement in the group as providing opportunities for developing skills, personally and professionally, at their own pace: “People join the group for different reasons...development [for beginners] is going to be different from someone who loves gardening and has their own back garden looking lovely” – William, facilitator. Opportunities for developing gardening knowledge were seen as facilitating other occupational and community related skill developments. Such skills included self-education skills, social and leadership skills, problem and solving and planning skills. For example: “… [One of the gardeners] was excellent at engaging people… in a different way and people worked better with her...” - Kate, facilitator. It was also reported by all participants as an opportunity to take advantage of new opportunities and opening up to people. “We tried growing…like artichokes. I didn’t even know what an artichoke was, you know …it was great like” - David, gardener.

Other themes emerged from the data. A separate theme emerged around the person centred nature of the group in terms of tensions for further development of the group to promote well-being, e.g. should the group take on more expert led educational aspects or remain informal and group led. Issues of dissatisfaction included participants’ comments on the name “mental health allotment” as drawing stigma. Another theme emerged concerning the allotment group’s effect on facilitators’ professional and personal practice.

**Discussion**

This study has indicated a positive influence of allotment group participation on well-being as defined for individuals and communities (e.g. Wilcock 2006; Blair et al 2008; Kaplan 1995). This is in keeping with international evidence on the beneficial occupation of gardening, occupational therapy and mental health (e.g. York and Wiseman 2012), giving a context for an Irish conversation on the matter. Themes of influence included the group ethos as well as setting and activities, and three
mechanisms of influence observed in the data: promoting coping, facilitating change and allowing opportunity for participants to develop skills. These mechanisms reflect recent findings by Castelein and Graham (2012) regarding proposed domains for outcome measures for best practice in mental health occupational therapy services.

**Theme: Influence of group ethos, task and setting**

Findings that there was an influence on wellbeing through the member-led, informal ethos, in which everyone is valued as equal, is in line with Fieldhouse’s findings regarding the cumulative and social benefits of allotment participation. All participants agreed that being equal and collaborative learners and workers within the group was a positive experience of a person centred partnership with trust and acceptance. This is reflected in previous research on what attributes people using mental health services look for in a valued therapeutic relationship with their occupational therapist (Blank 2004).

There was agreement that the work of gardening played a role in feeling good through allotment participation and that it allowed universal participation of gardeners at many graded levels that it allowed them to come and go as they needed, and saw gardeners experience diversion from pain or negative thoughts, and a sense a feeling of time going quickly. This is reminiscent of the concept of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). This engaging element of the group was viewed as facilitating “Chit chat” and “easy conversation” and was recognised by facilitators and gardeners alike as a therapeutic medium.

The natural setting was viewed by all participants to contribute to a well-being influence. This is reflected in the work of Pretty et al (2007) and (Pretty et al 2005). Moreover, the sense of community and lack of segregation was also uncovered as a factor that supports well-being. This reflects research by Fieldhouse (2003) and Diamant and Waterhouse (2010) on the grading of an allotment environment to facilitate supported community integration in real community settings, in line with Wilcock (2006). Despite positive findings regarding the setting, some discussion arose regarding access and the remote location of the allotment. It was suggested that if it was more in plain sight in town it could provide more public support and pride for the town, and that the inclusion of an on-site polly-tunnel would reduce lost time travelling between sites on wet days.
Theme: Promoting coping
In terms of coping, the allotment group was viewed by all participants as supporting well-being through promoting psychological and functional coping. This was achieved through opportunities to engage in positive and meaningful experiences, and experience motivation (Mee et al 2004; Mee and Sumson 2001) and a sense of agency and satisfaction in their work. It was also observed as contributing to a sense of routine and purpose in all gardeners days that promoting effective time use, intrinsic motivation and volition for other activities of daily living.

Theme: facilitating change
The influence of the group was described in terms of facilitating change. This finding is in line with those of York and Wiseman (2012) and was ascribed, by a majority of the participants, to the constantly changing nature of the natural allotment environment, and participants' genuine interest in gardening. Facilitating change was viewed by all participants to be an influence on well-being. All participants spoke about changes they had made to their lives as a result of allotment participation. Some discussed improvements in their confidence to return to education or work; others reported increased outdoor activity and improved sense of lifestyle balance. For those with nothing else going on the group was seen to be as a work role in that it provided them with something positive and productive to do that led to feelings of satisfaction, achievement and social interaction. For those expressing a sense of lack of control or rest in their lives it was described as being a source of contentment and quiet that was comparable to a holiday.

Theme: Skill development
All participants reported a sense of skill development as an influence of allotment participation and all participants reported this in relation to well-being. Some participants described how their gardening skills had improved and this gave them confidence to take on leadership roles in the group, and in their own lives. These leadership skills also improved feelings of well-being in the participants. All participants reported that their skill development had allowed them to open up to new opportunities, for some increasing their satisfaction and others, their social contact. This is in line with findings from Fieldhouse (2003) on the cumulative nature of the benefits from allotment participation.
Other themes
A separate theme around the dissatisfaction with the group’s reported name “mental health allotment” as drawing stigma raised an important ethical consideration in terms of stigma and labelling, reflecting ongoing concerns regarding stigma and mental health (Cleary et al 2012) and the availability of support and funding for such projects through the use of labels and diagnoses (Nagle et al 2002). During the study, a majority of the participants agreed that the name would be changed to focus on health promotion and building strengths. The issue of labelling and stigma requires further research regarding its effect on the influence of well-being of the allotment.

The theme of professional practice influences is also of interest. Findings suggest that the clear occupational therapy focused role of the facilitators and the sense of collaboration with the gardeners that the group affords them may be preventative factors for work stress and burnout (Scanlan et al 2010; Lloyd et al 2002; Bassett and Lloyd 2001). Moreover, further attention could be directed towards member-led services and the tensions involved around making improvements to such services when consensus is required.

Implications of the study for occupational therapy
The corroborating accounts from data gathered through interview and ethnographic methods overwhelmingly assert that this allotment garden has had a positive influence on all participants; gardeners and facilitators alike. This may be viewed as supporting evidence for the use of gardening in occupational therapy practices. It also provides evidence in line with occupational therapy ethos and theories such as Wilcock’s (2006) concept of “Doing, being, becoming and belonging” through occupation (p.209). This research found allotment participation to be a medium for normalising, supportive, satisfying, skilled group work that achieves positive results for well-being, as evidenced by the progression of participants in their personal and professional lives.

These findings may lend credence to the growing body of research around occupational therapy involvement in similar grass root community projects, such as “Men’s Sheds” whose motto, “Men don’t talk face to face; they talk shoulder to shoulder” (www.menssheds.ie 2013), reflects findings in this study of the facilitation of easy conversation through doing gardening tasks.
In terms of further implications for therapist practice and education, it can be viewed that being perceived as person centred and member-led was vital to success as a facilitator. So too, group ethos was considered crucial to the success of the group influence as it had a substantial influence on members. Similarly the importance being person centred and member-led, especially regarding the naming of an occupational therapy group, and how it is spoken about, was asserted by the majority of participants and should be considered in future practice. This successful involvement of gardeners opinions, in the future planning and leadership of the group may be further used in practice to reflect current movements towards the human rights approaches and democratisation of mental health services to people in their own communities around the world (e.g. Patel and Prince 2010; Hammell 2008).

**Limitation**
Lack of demographic information raises issues for this case study's generalisability. However, it was not appropriate to collect demographic information regarding the participants’ age and diagnosis as it would have been contradictory to the group’s non-invasive ethos. Ideally, a non-invasive outcome measure might be included in the occupational therapy process for such an allotment group in future. Other limitations relate to the small number of participants, in one rural area and specifically to one aspect of health service provision, i.e. mental health.

**Future research**
This may endeavour to address the use of outcome measures in relation to the research question. It may also involve the gardeners who use the mental health service from the research inception to have their voice including in the study design from the beginning.

**Conclusion**
This study explored the influence of participation in an allotment group on its members through qualitative ethnographic methods. Participants were gardeners using a mental health service and facilitators working in the same mental health service. The emergent themes from the data assert a strong positive influence of participation on well-being. This was achieved through the use of meaningful, healthy and engaging occupation in a supportive, green and knowledge-fertile environment. These factors allowed for mechanisms of influence on wellbeing that engaged and empowered participants to cope with life, embrace change and develop new skills for
life and work, through a meaningful and graded challenge. Considerations for future allotment group use in therapeutic services may include the grading of the tasks, the ethos and name of the group and the optimal setting for the allotment site. Future research may look at more robust, yet non-invasive outcome measures to explore the influence further. Findings are in line with current mental health occupational therapy theory and research, and support the role of occupational therapy in the use of gardening as a therapeutic tool for mental health services.

Acknowledgments:

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References:


Appendices

Appendix A: Prompts for Participant Observation field notes:

Date/time: ________________________________

Details observed: ________________________________

• Who (man/woman)?
• How many people around?
• Where: in shed/at beds/in canteen/other

Conditions: ________________________________

• Weather?
• Environmental factors?
• General mood of the group (subjective)

Indicators of well-being (?) observed:

• Non verbals: Body language/ facial expressions/ demeanour of happiness / good health
• Verbals: Positive conversations/singing/whistling/
• Behaviours: productive/sharing/flow/
• Other: ________________________________

Outdoor/gardening factors associated with well-being:

• Involved in nature
• Outdoor (fresh air)
• Exercise
• Generativity
• Occupation
• Flow
• Other ________________________________

Social interactions observed involved in well-being:

• Company/cooperativeness/inclusion/
• Teaching / learning / mentoring relationship/
• Giving/ magnanimity/ altruism/
• Sharing/reciprocity/
• Empathy/understanding/ acceptance/common ideals-ideas-outlooks
• Other ________________________________

General Comments
Appendix B: Interview schedules

Introduction Script

As you know I am Jenny Joyce from the Department of Clinical Therapies at the University of Limerick.

The purpose of this research project is to explore your experience of taking part in the allotment group.

Before we begin,

• Please turn off your mobile phone or put it on silent. We should not be disturbed during the interview but if we are I will turn off the tape recorder to deal with the interruption.
• Feel free to interrupt or ask for more information and let me know if you require a break during the interview.
• If I take notes during the interview it is for me to use as a prompt as part of a question- to assist my memory
• I am interested in your opinions and personal experiences. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions.

Again, please can I have your permission to record this interview?

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B.I Questions for Group Facilitators:

1) Tell me about your involvement with the allotment group?
   - Were you involved in the establishment of the group?
   - If so, what were your aims in establishing this group?
   - What evidence had you looked at? Where did the idea come from?
   - How did you feel about it before you got involved?
   - What was the process like?

2) What attracted you to this project?
   - Did you take part in any projects like this before?
   - How long have you had an interest in gardening / growing your own vegetables?
   - What were your first impressions of this project?

3) From what you have seen, what do you think the benefits or challenges for the members of the group?
   - in terms of their mental health and well-being?
   - occupational aspects?
   - Social aspects?
   - Spiritual aspects?
   - Any other unexpected benefits?
- Were there any aspects that you thought should be beneficial that were not in practice?

4) Thinking about when you were facilitating this group – how did you feel?
   - what did you enjoy about this group?
   - what did you want to get out of this group?
   - what were the things that you liked in the allotment?
   - Were there any parts of the group that you were surprised about?
     (unexpectedly enjoyed)
   - What made you come back each week?

5) Thinking about when you were participating in this group - How do you think you have benefitted from taking part in the group?
   - how did you feel about the outdoors?
   - Getting exercise outdoors
   - Growing plants / your own vegetables
   - Learning new skills
   - Meeting new people

6) In your own life - have you made any changes in your life based on taking part in this group?
   - Have you kept up on any of your gardening? Pots? Patios?
   - Have you taken any new exercise?
   - Started on any new courses?
   - Joined any new groups?
   - Do you think the group has changed the way you see yourself? Has it helped you to do more things you want to do?

7) What do you think are the most important things about setting up a good allotment group?
   - what would you recommend for people trying to set up an allotment group?
   - What are the things you wouldn’t recommend? What would you change?
   - What are the best benefits from taking part and how would you set it up so these could happen?

   Any final comments?

   For the Facilitators- they will be asked to bring the Allotment Group Journal to prompt discussion.

*********************************************************************************
B.II Questions with questions for Present Members

For the previous and current group members- images of gardening tasks (taken form catalogues/ web) will be used to prompt discussion e.g. digging, planting, collecting vegetables.

1) Tell me about your involvement with the allotment group?
   - what did you want to get out of this group?
   - what were the things that you liked in the allotment?
   - What attracted you to the group?
   - Were there any parts of the group that you were surprised about? (unexpectedly enjoyed)
   - What makes you come back each week?

2) How long have you had an interest in gardening / growing your own vegetables?
   - Did you take part in any projects like this before?
   - What attracted you to this project?
   - What were your first impressions of this project?

3) How do you think you have benefitted from taking part in the group?
   - how do you feel about the outdoors?
   - Getting exercise outdoors
   - Growing plants / your own vegetables
   - Learning new skills
   - Meeting new people

4) Has the allotment group brought you any challenges?
   - how do you feel about the outdoors?
   - Getting exercise outdoors
   - Growing plants / your own vegetables
   - Learning new skills
   - Meeting new people

5) Have you made any changes in your life based on taking part in this group?
   - Have you started/continued/ to do any gardening at home/elsewhere? Pots? Patios?
   - Have you taken any new exercise/activities?
   - Started on any new courses?
   - Joined any new groups?
   - Do you think the group has changed the way you see yourself? Has it helped you to do more things you want to do?
6) What do you think are the most important things about setting up a good allotment group?
- what would you recommend for people trying to set up an allotment group?
- What are the things you wouldn’t recommend? What would you change?
- What are the best benefits from taking part and how would you set it up so these could happen?

7) Please describe an average allotment group session? What is involved?
What plans do you make and what control do you have over your activities on a given day?
What have you been doing this last week since you joined (time use)?
Any final comments?

B.III General Questions with questions for Past members
For the previous and current group members- images of gardening tasks (taken form catalogues/ web) will be used to prompt discussion e.g. digging, planting, collecting vegetables.

1) How long have you had an interest in gardening / growing your own vegetables?
- Did you take part in any projects like this before?
- What attracted you to this project?
- What were your first impressions of this project?

2) What did you enjoy about this group?
- what did you want to get out of this group?
- what were the things that you liked in the allotment?
- Were there any parts of the group that you were surprised about (unexpectedly enjoyed)?
- What made you come back each week?

3) Looking back now, how do you think you have benefitted from taking part in the group?
- Just after the group?
- Now looking back?
- How did you feel about the outdoors before and after?
- Getting exercise outdoors
- Growing plants / your own vegetables
- Learning new skills
- Meeting new people
4) Looking back now, were there any challenges for you in the allotment group?
- How did you feel about the outdoors before and after?
- Getting exercise outdoors
- Growing plants / your own vegetables
- Learning new skills
- Meeting new people

5) Have you made any changes in your life based on taking part in this group?
- Have you kept up on any of your gardening? Pots? Patios?
- Have you taken any new exercise?
- Started on any new courses?
- Joined any new groups?
- Do you think the group has changed the way you see yourself? Has it helped you to do more things you want to do?

6) What do you think are the most important things about setting up a good allotment group?
- What would you recommend for people trying to set up an allotment group?
- What are the things you wouldn’t recommend? What would you change?
- What are the best benefits from taking part and how would you set it up so these could happen?

7) Please describe an average allotment group session? What is involved?
What plans do you make and what control do you have over your activities on a given day?
What have you been doing this last week since you joined (time use)?
Any final comments?