

# Branching Out

## Greenspace and Conservation on Referral

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### Summary

Branching Out offers greenspace and conservation on referral for adults using mental health services in the central Scotland area. Service evaluation found improvements to clients' physical health, mental wellbeing and social skills after the 12-week course of woodland activities.



### Introduction

Branching Out is an innovative service development for adults using mental health services in the central Scotland area. Clients are referred to the project directly from mental health services, which have included forensic, employability, discharge and resettlement, learning disability, recreational therapy and community mental health teams.

For each client, the service consists of approximately three hours of ecotherapy per week in a woodland setting. Clients work together in small groups of six to twelve for a twelve-week period. The course includes elements of bushcraft, nature conservation, environmental art, green exercise and relaxation. On completion of the course clients receive certificates of achievement, and are supported to move on to other recreation, volunteer and training opportunities.



### Methodology

Evaluation of the first year of Branching Out was undertaken using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. For each client completing the programme (n=76), pre and post measures of wellbeing, general health and physical activity were ascertained and compared using the following measures:

- Short Form 12 Version 2 Health Survey (SF12v2™)
- Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS)
- Scottish Physical Activity Questionnaire (SPAQ)

These quantitative measures were enriched by a more explorative qualitative component gained through:

- Semi-structured interviews (n=29)
- Focus groups (n=8)
- Observational journals (n=1)

The data gained therein was thematically analysed to determine the perceived benefits and limitations of the service.



### Results

The Branching Out service evaluation found several positive outcomes:

- High service uptake (95% of available places taken)
- High completion rates (70%) in a hard to reach population
- Significant increase in physical activity
- Self-reported improvements in self-esteem, confidence and social skills
- Strong trends towards improvement of mental well-being for high severity groups
- Provision of daily structure/routine
- Transferable skill acquisition
- Intergenerational appeal (17-88) and appeal to both sexes

The evaluation did have limitations due primarily to the number of clients passing through the service, no control group, no data from those who drop out and no follow up data beyond the 12-week intervention.



### Conclusion

It appears from the results of this evaluation that Branching Out can be effectively used as an additional form of treatment in a secondary and tertiary care mental health population. These positive outcomes demonstrate the benefits of the environmental and health sectors working together to deliver health outcomes for mental health service users.

As the programme did not require any additional premises, beyond the work-bases of the NHS and FCS staff, cost per head per day was under fifty pounds. The programme therefore appears to offer excellent value for money. Mental health services providers and clinical practitioners should give due consideration to adopting and supporting programmes like Branching Out as part of a wider menu of adjunct treatment options.

A Branching Out Leaders course has recently been developed to support the expansion of the model across Scotland. During 2011/12 we aim to run twenty Branching Out groups in four NHS (National Health Service) areas, in partnership with a wide range of environmental organisations.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that greenspace on referral is used as an additional form of treatment in secondary and tertiary care mental health populations.

### Contact

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