Turning Over a New Leaf

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Service-User Involvement

The Occupational Therapy Team at Townsend Court have had a creative summer in developing the new allotment in the garden of the Acute Mental Health Unit. Earlier in the Spring, service-users and Occupational Therapy Staff planned out and created the allotment to begin growing sunflowers, tomatoes, leaks, lettuce and plenty of carrots!

Once a week, an Occupational Therapy session was dedicated to the therapeutic activity of gardening, where service-users participated in planting and maintaining the crop of vegetables. The evidence based research that underpins such activity is increasing and, with this in mind, the Occupational Therapists were keen to see the benefits within the service itself (Fieldhouse 2003, Fieldhouse & Sempik 2007).

With access to an endowment fund, the group were provided with some finances to develop the garden into a more therapeutic environment, for which a trip to a local garden centre was needed. With the help of a volunteer (and stakeholder) who has a keen interest in gardening, the areas surrounding the Unit were transformed into an array of colour.
Another successful group that was established and has been running throughout the summer and into the autumn, has been the Creative Workshop. This is another group that runs with the support of a volunteer and stakeholder, who has a special interest in photography. This group has been able to encapsulate the beauty of the growing garden in the exceptionally clear and artistic photos that have been taken, as a further form of meaningful occupation.

It has not just been the outside of the Unit that has been having a ‘make-over’, as around the Unit, too, there has been a transformation using different art-work mediums. During the past year, Occupational Therapy staff and service-users have creatively been working together to produce framed art to decorate the interior of the Unit. Gathering inspiration from the seasons to favourite abstract artists, a series of pictures have been produced that have been a talking point amongst people connected to Townsend Court.

Originally the job appeared over-whelming as there were over 30 frames to fill with creative art. However, month by month and using the art and craft sessions within the therapeutic timetable effectively, the Unit has been transformed into its own gallery. Service-users have taken much pride over producing pieces of work that are then displayed for all to see.

Joint working has been observed when a group of service-users have really been able to connect over a mutual and positive activity. Occupational Therapists have often used art as a way of assessing concentration,
problem solving and social interaction during the session (Griffiths & Corr 2007) and, with this in mind, it was observed to be so beneficial for service-users to work together on a common project that has enhanced their self esteem.

With a Special thanks to the Volunteers involved.

References

