



OT 24 Hour Virtual Exchange

October 29/30/31

[Depending on where you are]

Exploring Balance



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The Benefits of Ecotherapy Interventions on Mental Health Conditions

No health without mental health (DH, 2011) outlines the coalition government's mental health strategy, and with it a commitment to improve the mental wellbeing of the UK population. Ecotherapy is an umbrella term for treatment modalities that include the natural world and which aim to enhance physical and/or mental health and wellbeing. Whilst the use of ecotherapies by occupational therapists in mental health settings is widespread (Parkinson, Lowe and Vecsey, 2011) a review of the literature reveals a scarcity of any larger scale studies to demonstrate the efficacy of such interventions.

The *Branch Out* project is a partnership consisting of a statutory mental health service and six charitable organisations, delivering a variety of ecotherapies to people with a range of mental health problems. 105 service users completed the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Well Being Scale (WEMWBS) both pre and post ecotherapy intervention. Results demonstrate an increase in WEMWBS scores across a range of mental health conditions, indicating that engaging in ecotherapy occupations improves perceptions of mental well being amongst those with mental health problems. These outcomes support the profession's pledge to research the effectiveness of occupations (College of Occupational Therapists, 2007), as well as providing clear evidence on which practicing occupational therapists can base ecotherapy interventions. The results also provide justification for a future larger scale study to further the robustness of the evidence base for occupations of this nature.

This presentation details an appraisal of the *Branch Out* project.

References

College of Occupational Therapists (2007) *Building the evidence for occupational therapy: priorities for research*. London: COT.

Department of Health (2011) *No health without mental health: a cross government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages*. London: DH.

Parkinson S, Lowe C, Vecsey T (2011) The therapeutic benefits of horticulture in a mental health service. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy* 74(11), 525-534.