



MHA Green Care Strategy

Developing Wellbeing through Nature

2022-2025



“Nature itself is the best physician” - Hippocrates



Our purpose

In April 2019, MHA launched a new five year strategy outlining how we would support people to live later life well. This strategy was reviewed during 2022 in the light of the coronavirus pandemic. Our strategy has five key areas to enable us to achieve this including:

- MHA reshaping care and later living
- MHA connections
- MHA enhancing later life
- MHA fit for the future
- MHA people

This Green Care Strategy builds upon MHA's strategy and seeks to ensure that we are able to enhance wellbeing for residents, members, families and colleagues through both structured and informal access to the natural world. Therefore, the aim of this Green Care Strategy is to guide us over the next three years to ensure we achieve our mission, values and vision.

Our Mission

As a charity, our mission is to enable people to live later life well.

Our Values

Inspired by our Methodist roots, we:

Respect every person, treating them with dignity

Nurture mind, body and spirit
Inspire the best in each other

Our Vision

By 2025 we will have increased the quality, impact and reach of our services by connecting our communities and realising our potential as one MHA.

Introduction

It is widely accepted that time spent outdoors, or finding ways of bringing the outdoors inside, provides us all with a sense of wellbeing. As long ago as the 5th Century BC, the father of modern day medicine, Hippocrates, is quoted as saying “Nature itself is the best physician”: it is only within the past few decades that scientists have really begun to understand the complex relationship between nature and our physical and mental health.

Many people within MHA already reap the rewards of engaging with the natural world. Our residents, members, volunteers and colleagues enjoy and benefit from nature in various ways; from spending time in our gardens, engaging with animals, trips to beauty spots, to flower arranging and nature based crafts. However, we know that we can and should do more.

This strategy builds upon recent successful projects within MHA where we have reclaimed and conserved several of our gardens that were in need, and developed a programme of nature based crafts suitable for older people.



This includes those living with dementia, in particular, the recently completed National Lottery Heritage Fund project at The Wilderness Garden, MHA Hall Grange, Shirley, Croydon. It also builds upon the fantastic work being carried out by colleagues throughout MHA.

Nature is inclusive and this strategy reflects this by seeking to bring to life the mission and values of MHA for us all, enabling us to grow together and to reach out to local communities as well as improving the holistic health and well-being of everyone.



Defining Wellbeing through Nature

Wellbeing through nature refers to the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual benefits that we all gain from interacting with the natural world. These benefits are achieved through a spectrum of nature based activities ranging from Everyday Life through Health Promotion and Green Care.

Everyday Life

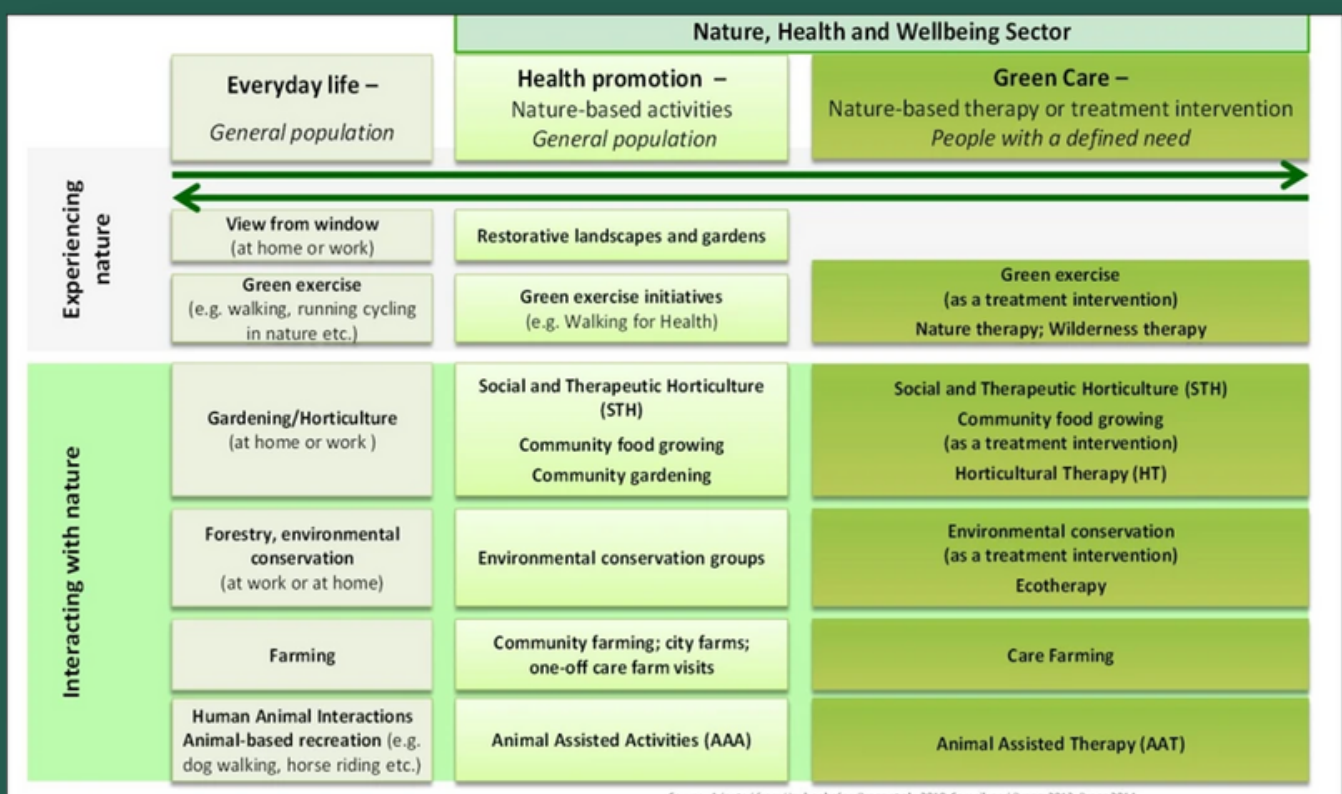
These activities are available in the daily life of the general population – such as taking ‘green’ exercise (e.g. running, walking, cycling in the countryside or green spaces), interactions with animals (e.g. horse riding and dog walking), gardening/horticulture (including growing food), farming, forestry and environmental conservation.

Health Promotion

These activities are aimed at the general population – such as green exercise initiatives (e.g. walking for health schemes), animal assisted activities, community gardening and food growing projects, community farming, city farms and environmental conservation groups. Engagement with these activities can be used to prevent chronic ill health.

Green Care

Green Care is a programme of person centred treatments or therapeutic interventions designed for individuals with a defined need and delivered and evaluated by trained / qualified practitioners.



Developing the Strategy

Our commitments are based upon what residents, members, families and colleagues have told us is important to them. We gathered this information through individual interviews, surveys and focus groups.

We have aligned our commitments with the impact and evaluation research carried out by MHA The Wilderness project as well as recent external academic research.



Our commitments to offer the best possible wellbeing through nature

Commitment one

We will ensure that all residents and members, together with their friends and loved ones, volunteers and colleagues have the opportunity, and are supported, to spend meaningful time in, or interacting with, nature.

Commitment two

We will train, support and resource colleagues and volunteers to ensure that they are equipped to deliver meaningful interaction with nature.

Commitment three

We will develop structured programmes of Social Therapeutic Horticulture (Green Care) that seek to address the individual needs of our residents and members.

Commitment one

We will ensure that all residents and members, together with their friends and loved ones, volunteers and colleagues have the opportunity, and are supported, to spend meaningful time in, or interacting with, nature.

- We will continue to invest in our gardens and outdoor spaces, making them as inviting, accessible and safe as possible.
- We will work towards ensuring that the principles of biophilic design (an approach to architecture that seeks to connect building occupants more closely to nature) are incorporated into both our existing and future building stock.
- We will always respect your wishes and will ask you if you would like to spend regular time outdoors – we will, wherever possible, facilitate your preferences.
- We will organise trips to accessible local parks and other natural spaces.
- We will deliver outdoor (weather dependent) and indoor activities that utilise natural resources.
- We will ensure that your visitors are able to spend time with you in our gardens.

What does the research say?

“Spending at least 120minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing”

(White, M.P., Alcock, I., Grellier, J. et al, 2019)



“The garden here is so lovely and how lucky we are.”

Resident

“Listen to that bird, isn’t it lovely.”

Resident

“Mum loved being in the garden & outdoors but has lost confidence to do things on her own.”

Relative

“My relative enjoys feeling the sun on their face and following the progress of the seasons. It soothes them to watch birds and squirrels. They enjoy the colour and scent of flowers, especially as they spend most of their time indoors.”

Relative

“Even residents who cannot access the garden, love to watch the changing seasons from the window.”

Colleague

“I enjoyed [the garden] very much... I’ll go again on my break time, it is relaxing and will be great to get some fresh air.”

Colleague

Commitment two

We will train, support and resource our front-line colleagues and volunteers to ensure that they are equipped to deliver meaningful interaction with nature.

- We will ensure that the benefits of spending time in and with nature are understood to be a priority by all colleagues and volunteers.
- We will include wellbeing through nature principles in the induction of all new colleagues.
- We will provide all schemes and homes with an electronic copy of the MHA Green Care Activities handbook developed during the Wilderness Project.
- We will regularly update and refresh the MHA Green Care Handbook.
- We will regularly update the MHA Gardeners diary to ensure that local colleagues are aware of the seasonal priorities for the garden.
- The MHA Gardening Services Manager will be available to provide one to one advice and support to colleagues on all horticultural matters.

What does the research say?

“Targeted nature-based programs, such as therapeutic horticulture, have been shown to result in multiple health benefits for older adults”

(Sia, A., Tam, W.W.S., Fogel, A et al 2020)



“Green activities need to be part of MHA as a whole, ingrained in the culture.”

Colleague

“[There needs to be] more encouragement & promotion of activities available.”

Relative

“I think for mum to do things outside in a natural surrounding instead of indoors all the time will definitely lift her spirits.”

Relative



Commitment three

We will develop structured programmes of Green Care that seek to address the person centred, individual needs of our residents and members.

- MHA The Wilderness team will lead on co-designing and rolling out Green Care programmes throughout our schemes and homes.
- We will develop a case for support to seek funding to enable qualified social therapeutic horticulture practitioners to be employed throughout MHA.
- We will seek to develop national partnerships with members of the 'Green Care Coalition'.
- We will seek to develop local partnerships with other Social Therapeutic Horticulture provider community groups.
- We will align the development of programmes of Green Care with the MHA Dementia strategy.



"My dementia is really bad today but I won't let it kick in, I want to have fun today and this looks very fun. This feels good, I love the feeling of the prickly holly. Isn't it beautiful?"

Resident

"I don't think we do any Green Care – do we?"

Resident

"He needs support and encouragement to be sociable to improve his mental health and to support him in feeling socially included."

Relative

What does the research say?

"... Green care providers should work together to provide a larger 'offer' to health and social care commissioners..."

(Bragg, R., Atkins, G. 2016)





In times of a health emergency, such as a pandemic

Covid-19 has taught us a lot and we will draw upon this experience to develop guidance for engaging with nature during a health emergency.

- We will, wherever practical, ensure that our gardens and outdoor spaces are appropriate and resourced for facilitating socially distanced visits during any future pandemic.
- We will ensure that, when safe to do so, activities in our gardens continue during any future pandemic.
- We will utilise MHA Digital Communities resources within our homes and schemes to facilitate virtual trips to locations of natural beauty around the world.



Implementing the strategy

All of our hopes and aspirations for the implementation of the Green Care strategy are reliant upon continued fundraising and the generosity of the public, relatives, volunteers and colleagues. We are extremely grateful for all the support we receive from the various trusts, organisations and continuing fundraising efforts. We acknowledge that the execution and promotion of this strategy is the key to its success. This is why we will be introducing a number of new initiatives, including:

- An audit of all MHA gardens and outdoor spaces to highlight successes and to identify areas for innovation and improvement.
- Working with the Society for Horticultural Therapy (known as THRIVE) and other organisations to develop our online training offer in Social Therapeutic Horticulture and Green Care
- Gathering a greater breadth of feedback from MHA residents and MHA community members about what they want from Green Care and nature based activities.
- Developing Green Care volunteering opportunities across homes and schemes
- Updating colleague's induction, to include the role that Green Care should play within homes and schemes.
- Identify and provide resources that can best support colleagues in provision of Green Care.
- Raising charitable funds to improve our outdoor spaces.
- Continuation of exploration of new ways of using technology to incorporate Green Care, particularly for those who cannot access the outdoors.
- Work alongside Digital communities in the provision of green care content relevant to the Green Care diary and seasons.
- Inclusion of Green Care into residents' Electronic care plans.
- Working with academic partners to develop our evaluation of the impact of Green Care.





References

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