

# Grow Well gives a hearty winter welcome to Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing of Wales

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It was an absolute privilege to welcome Sarah Murphy, Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing of Wales to the Grow Well project at ACE's Dusty Forge in Ely this week. Yes, a garden visit in the depths of January! As participants and staff shared with the minister, community gardening can be a lifeline to move more and improve mental health and wellbeing, even in the winter months, when many people find they can become more isolated, particularly if they live alone.

Isla Horton, Director of Grow Cardiff the charity that set up Grow Well in partnership with the South West Primary Care Cluster in 2016 explains: 'The aim of the project is to welcome people who very likely don't think of themselves as gardeners to a safe, therapeutic space

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each week. Here they can connect with others and nature - losing themselves in the garden, to find themselves again’.

The project, which has 4 sites across the city welcomes everyone, but particularly those who may be struggling with their mental or physical health, loneliness or isolation.

Participants are referred through their local GP, through a social prescribing pathway, or can self-refer.

Chris, the Grow Well project Co-ordinator explained what a typical session entails: “Firstly, we start with the essentials: a good cuppa, a warm welcome and a check in. ‘How are you? How was your week?’ The garden is co-designed and co-created by the people who come here each week and reflects the things that matter to them. Some people like to feed the birds or check out the pond. Some love to sow or take pleasure in watering or harvesting. Some love to cook the produce grown and share recipes. Some like to build, craft and create. For some it's the quiet, stillness and rest. Others love a natter. The wonderful thing is that everyone has a gift or a skill they can contribute. That’s where we start and we build on that each week”.



Today in the garden, homemade soup and stories from the Christmas period were shared - with the gentle empathy and understanding that the holiday season can be extremely difficult for many. As a result of days like today, Grow Well

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participants and the garden are thriving together, even through the colder months. Last year the garden was a finalist in the Keep Wales Tidy Community Garden Transformation of the Year Award, but it is the transformation of individuals' lives through the project that the team are most proud of.

One project participant who has been coming to the garden since 2021 shared their experience: **“I've found a supportive and wonderful group with Grow Well .... They changed my life.”**

Sarah Murphy, Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing took a tour of the community garden. The Minister has recently spoken about the importance of joined-up, person-centred and needs-led support to improve people's health and wellbeing. Reflecting on her visit to the Grow Well project, the minister said: **“Community gardening can have a hugely positive impact on a person's mental health and wellbeing. It's been fantastic to see the work being carried out to support people, particularly those who are struggling with loneliness, by making sure they have someone to talk to and can enjoy their time here too. Initiatives like this are a key part of social prescribing that can boost health and wellbeing.”**



We couldn't agree more! This year as Grow Cardiff turns 10 years old we want to sow and share the 'feel good factor' of Grow Well with more people than ever before.

Isla Horton, Director, Grow Cardiff 16/01/25