

GROW WELL PROJECT (SW Primary Care Cluster) IMPACT REPORT 2025

Therapeutic nature-based social prescribing for mental health & wellbeing
in south-west, central and south Cardiff



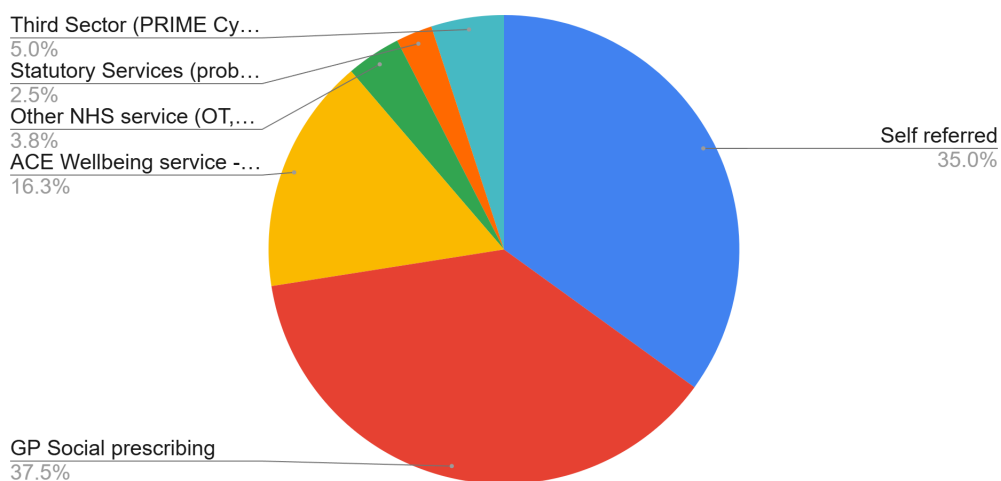
“The Grow Well project helps so many people. It gives us a space to go to and get away from the things on our mind. It helps us develop our skills and it makes us more confident.... I’ve learnt how to grow my own food and how to grow flowers. I came to the project joking that anything I would grow will die. I ended up growing a courgette on my first go. Seeing the plant thrive and grow under my care was amazing...I’ve found a supportive and wonderful group with Grow Well. They changed my life.” Project Participant, January 2025

Why 'Grow Well'

Grow Well is a unique, pioneering project begun in 2015 by registered charity Grow Cardiff, in partnership with the SW Cardiff Primary Care Cluster and from summer 2024, with the City & South Cardiff Cluster. There's a drop of 22 years in life expectancy from the leafy suburb of Lisvane in north Cardiff to the communities of Riverside, Ely and Canton where our Grow Well SW community gardens are based¹. Over nine years, Grow Cardiff has developed a unique social therapeutic horticulture approach that uses community gardening as a tool to significantly improve the mental and physical health of local people in Ely, Caerau, Canton, Riverside, Grangetown and Butetown. The Grow Well project also aims to reduce isolation and loneliness, provide routine and purpose, create connection and community, boost confidence, create beautiful, biodiverse oases in the city and send everyone home each week with bags of delicious, nutritious home-grown salads, vegetables, fruit and herbs. As such, Grow Well provides a practical alternative to clinical models of healthcare. We're shifting the paradigm, so that GP surgeries and community centres where our gardens are based, become centres for wellbeing: people and nature thriving together.

Each week, year round, our highly-skilled staff team facilitates sessions for participants across four Grow Well community garden sites. Patients are referred to the project through established social prescribing pathways, developed in partnership with our local primary care Clusters, community-based and local authority health and social care providers. Individuals also self-refer.

Referral Routes to the Grow Well project (2023-2024)

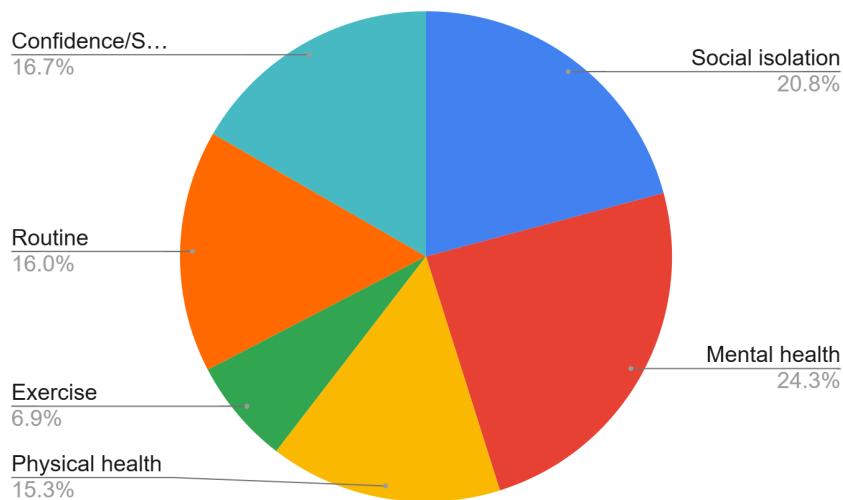


¹ Cardiff South West Cluster Profile Summary October 2022

How do we know Grow Well works? Evidence of Impact

Whilst the project welcomes all who are interested in taking part in weekly sessions, it particularly focuses on engaging and removing barriers to participation from those struggling with mental and physical health, loneliness and isolation - very often people living with a complex, often chronic, mix of health conditions and social challenges.

Reasons for Referral to Grow Well (2023-2024)



In response, Grow Cardiff has pioneered a unique approach that is 'asset-based', trauma-informed, and patient-led. Whilst we welcome and recognise the complex challenges with which patients first present, we focus on their lived experience, gifts, skills, and potential contribution in a nature-filled setting,

"Everyone brings their own qualities ... we work on what's strong, not what's wrong."

(Grow Well participant, 2024)

Most people we work with have never gardened before and certainly don't think of themselves as gardeners – at first! Community gardening is a wonderful, diverse toolbox – there's something for everyone. There's always time to talk and connect with others and nature, accompanied with lashings of tea, plus delicious fresh produce to take home.

Chris, the Grow Well project Co-ordinator describes a typical weekly session: "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".

Using this unique approach, in the last 18 months, across 4 sites, Grow Well has:

- Engaged over 150 regular participants
- Welcomed over 1500 visitors
- Grown and shared 74Kg of fresh produce

The bar chart below illustrates the difference in wellbeing scores for 40 project participants, before and after taking part in Grow Well between 2022 and 2024. (Scores were recorded using SWEMWBS² , a national, standardised tool used to measure mental wellbeing).

Self-reported wellbeing scores before and after Grow Well intervention, 2022-2024



² Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

Grow Well in context: nationally, regionally, locally

Grow Well is a pioneer of social prescribing in Cardiff and Wales. Welsh Government's National Social Prescribing Framework was launched from the Dusty Forge, where Grow Well has a base, in 2024.

Grow Well delivers against all of the key principles of the national framework:

The principles of social prescribing, such as taking an early preventive approach to enhancing people's health and wellbeing, addressing health inequalities and strengthening community cohesion, are consistent with the Social Services Well-being Act (Wales) 2014, the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015, and our long term plan for health and social care 'A Healthier Wales'. Welsh Government (2024) National Framework for Social Prescribing

Grow Well contributes to the delivery of Cardiff & Vale Regional Partnership Board's Joint Area Plan 2023-2028 fulfilling key drivers to be preventative, support patients closer to home, to be inclusive, embrace diversity, be co-produced, sustainable and add social value. It effectuates the Ageing Well and Living Well agendas, supporting adults with learning disabilities, unpaid carers, those with physical disabilities, those in need of mental health support, neurodiverse adults and those experiencing isolation, all of whom are present amongst regular project participants.










At a local level, Grow Well supports the delivery of the South West and City & South Primary Cluster plans. The Director of the SW Cluster describes Grow Well as a 'flagship project' supporting the Cluster's aims to, ***"improve population health through a joined-up system of communities, third and independent sector partners, primary and community services. All partners will work together to support individual, family and community resilience and, in so doing, enhance health and well-being, reducing the need for statutory services to meet well-being outcomes and combatting the health consequences of loneliness, isolation and disconnection."*** SW Primary Care Cluster Plan 24-25



Over the last five years, Grow Cardiff has forged a strong partnership with the Wales School of Social Prescribing Research (WSSPR) to develop a bespoke monitoring tool that independently assesses the impact of Grow Well on participant health and well-being. WSSPR concluded that,

“A number of elements contributed to how Grow Well works, including the power of prescription, co production and choice, sensory effects of green spaces – in this case the Grow Well garden, therapeutic support of trained staff and by offering opportunities for interpersonal connections ... a range of volunteer benefits were evidenced in this evaluation such as reduced social isolation, improvements to mental, physical and social health, increased social capital and a sense of belonging to one’s community.” (Evaluation of the Grow Well Project, WSSPR, 2022)

In addition, the Grow Well project has received the following recognition:

-  2018 Nesta Innovate to Save project
-  2020 Bevan Exemplar project
-  2020 - 2024 Green Flag Awards (for consecutive years since 2020, including first health surgery in Wales to be awarded a Green Flag)
-  2021 UK Social Prescribing Network Awards: Best Nature-based project
-  2022 NHS Forest Active Community Engagement Award winners
-  2022 Keep Wales Tidy Best Health Initiative of the Year
-  2023 RHS/BBC OneShow national finalist ‘Community Garden project of the Year’
-  2024 Keep Wales Tidy Community Garden Transformation of the Year finalist
-  2024 Mental Health & Wellbeing Awards Wales, Volunteer of the Year winner

Funding Grow Well

Since 2021, through two successive rounds of two year funding, Grow Cardiff has successfully applied for grant funding for Grow Well in SW Cardiff. Grow Cardiff applied for funding through CVUHB’s Cardiff & Vale Health Charity, to NHS Charities Together, whose panel described Grow Well as ‘quite inspirational’. In 2023 Grow Cardiff was one of just 10 projects across the whole of the UK

to successfully apply for NHS Charities Together's 'Greener Communities' funding and the only project in Wales to do so. Grow Cardiff secured funding for Grow Well from the City & South Cluster to develop the project in Grangetown following a successful tendering process. In addition, the charity has secured a number of smaller grant funds enabling the team to further physically landscape the Grow Well sites and provide an alternative, indoor 'Creative Grow Well' nature-based arts and crafts programme, for participants who struggle with the inclement weather in the cooler winter months. Grow Cardiff has also secured over £10K in in-kind funding through partnerships with Keep Wales Tidy, Probation Community Payback Team and Lovell.

What next for Grow Well? Future Sustainability and Development

Merthyr Tydfil had the highest number of organisations providing social prescribing services per 100,000 of population, whilst Cardiff reports the lowest in Wales.'

Welsh Government (2024) National Framework for Social Prescribing

Current funding for Grow Well in the SW Cluster runs until 31st July 2025 and in the City and South Cluster, until 31st October 2025. Beyond this, future funding for the project has yet to be secured.

The Grow Cardiff board of trustees and staff team are 100% committed to delivering, sustaining and developing Grow Well in partnership with the SW and City & South Primary Care clusters. We are also keen to expand Grow Well's reach into other communities, working in partnership with other Primary Care Clusters across the city, through our unique offer of therapeutic community gardening.

We therefore have two proposals: Firstly, a three-year plan for continuity funding for Grow Well. This would secure the existing Grow Well service in the SW and City & South Clusters. The second is a development budget, expanding Grow Well into new areas of the city. Having survived on grant pots of 3 months - 2 years funding at most for over 8 years, we are proposing a more sustained funding model for Grow Well from April 2025 - March 2028. This would enable Grow Cardiff to significantly develop and sustain the project's impact and provide some job security for our highly skilled, dedicated and experienced staff team³.

"Investment needs to be part of a long-term commitment that not only results in rapid outcomes but also allows time for the full impact to be realised" World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre for Investment in Health and Wellbeing (Jan, 2025), 'Investing in a Healthier Wales: Prioritising Prevention'

³ Available on request to Grow Cardiff's Director

Conclusion

Grow Well is an exceptional project developed over almost 10 years, that has pioneered best practice in green social prescribing in Wales. Our unique approach contributes to the delivery of national, regional and local health and social care policy. With a proven track record, engaging some of the most vulnerable and hardest to reach patients, experiencing some of the worst health inequalities in Wales, Grow Well can evidence its impact in significantly improving mental health and wellbeing of participants. With just 6 months' project funding remaining, there has never been a more important time to invest in its future.

Isla Horton

Grow Cardiff Director, January 2025