



# Growing Minds:

## Cultivating Positive Mental Health and Green Living Workshop

A collaborative community event held by  
**Hulme Garden Centre**  
&  
**Division of Psychology and Mental Health**  
University of Manchester



Held at



*June 8<sup>th</sup> 2024*

**Organised and nurtured by**

**Alex Prodan**

**Chelsea Sawyer**

**&**

**Stella Gkika**



### *What was this event?*

The **GROWING MINDS WORKSHOP** had been planned by our Environmental Sustainability Team in the Division of Psychology and Mental Health for over 6 months. It was designed:

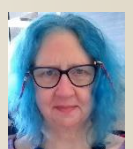
- To celebrate the beginning of **The Big Green Week 8<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> June 2024**
- To be a free event, including lunch, held in the **Community**
- To share and explore views and experiences about the **Environment & Mental Health**
- To have talks led by Experts-By-Experience about links between **Nature & Mental Health**
- To have an interactive session about **Foraging**
- To have fun with **Crafts** – making a bug hotel, planting herbs, make a seed bomb, painting

It was funded by Alex, Chelsea and Stella **winning money** from a Dragons' Den bid, sponsored by the School of Health Sciences, University of Manchester.

This was a brilliant event with a genuinely warm, friendly, inclusive, atmosphere.

*We'll try to tell you a bit about what we got up to.*

Trish Gooding, Social Responsibility Lead, Division of Psychology and Mental Health



## **EXPERTS-BY-EXPERIENCE** shared their personal ‘journeys’ highlighting the synergies between mental health and the environment.

We found the really honest and trusting ways that these personal journeys were shared to be very touching indeed. The way that we all felt able to chip in with questions, comments, and snippets of our own, very much brought home how quickly a group of people who don't know each other really can meaningfully bond, and readily share whatever comes to mind in-the-moment.



**Speaker 1 Hugo Johnston** spoke about how his experiences of voyaging into nature helped him reflect on ways that he hadn't been able to previously. These experiences were in the context of living-with grief and bereavement.

Ways that the urban environment seemed to force an inward focus, closing down abilities and desires to truly and honestly reflect or even to know that reflection and allowing openness-to-self was a possibility were contrasted with the unfolding effects of being in nature, being by water, being with trees ....seeing, touching, hearing, smelling....allowing self to be.

**Speaker 2 Luana Scrivano** spoke about green spaces and benefits to mental health. The way that Luana conveyed information about basic physiology, and how being in nature helps to stabilise bodily functions like blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing rate, made it seem both interesting and accessible.

It was particularly good to hear how beneficial simply walking in green spaces was for us, both physically and mentally. No need to run a marathon or sprint heroically. Indeed, without really noticing it, walking invites all the senses to sample what's around. Walking also makes it possible for all the senses to communicate, to 'share' whatever they are picking up about our world.







**Speaker 3 Joe Keane** shared his experiences of using nature and gardening to promote positive mental health. It was truly lovely when he told us with real passion how much he revelled in getting his hands stuck into the soil when gardening – the smell of the soil, of damp soil, the feel of it as you work with it.

Joe reflected on how gardening can, and does, enhance the sense of smell and how central smell is to all aspects of our lives, including memories, yet how we can so easily simply not know anymore how things smell.

He spoke very movingly about memories and the cycles of life and death. Yet through those cycles, nurturing continues. He illustrated this by telling us about his mother's love of roses which lives on in him as he looks after and nurtures a rose bush that was his mother's favourite and which she died beside.

We just had to share this lovely photo with you of Joe looking at the trees in Hulme Garden Centre



And this is a pic of the cat who joined us!



And this is a lovely one also of Chelsea explaining how the day will pan out



**AND NOW TO FORAGING**







Next, we were truly inspired by a highly immersive, and fascinating session from Karl Brillberg from [wildfood.co.uk](http://wildfood.co.uk) about foraging. Karl started with a great little grounding exercise that we could all manage. Then he talked to us all about foraging. Karl brought us cookies, 'champagne', mushrooms, 'tea', and seeds.



To give you a feel, here is a sweet cicely seed in the palm of my hand. We were asked to roll it in our palm but not to touch it yet with our fingertips. Then we were asked to touch it with our fingertips – to feel its 'ribs'; to see if there were any patterns on the seed. Then we were asked to rub it gently on our forearm which is a sensitive skin area or rub it gently against our cheek. After that we could smell it – with each nostril in turn, then to squeeze it a little by our ear to see if the outer 'shell' of the seed made a noise.

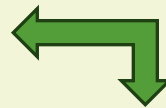
Next, we could put it in our mouths but we weren't allowed to chew. We had to roll it gently in our mouths and against our gums.

Finally, we could chew. Aniseed with tinges of 'green'. We were all looking at each other as we chewed for reassurance. Sweet cicely, Karl had told us, looks like Hemlock which is deadly but smells 'bad'.

No-one died!



**KARL SHARING A LITTLE BIT ABOUT FORAGING WITH US ALL**





*After a fab lunch which included vegan food, and cakes (!)  
we tried our hand at crafts! Chelsea, Stella, Luana, and a  
young volunteer called Gemma (thank-you Gemma) got  
everyone involved!*



Here we have bug hotels



Planting herb seeds



Painting plant pots

Making seed-bombs



Any questions about the day please email Trish  
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