

## **Flourish at Holton Lee and the Five Ways to Wellbeing**

Livability Holton Lee is a wellbeing discovery centre set in 350 acres of beautiful and tranquil Dorset countryside. Hidden in the heart of a nature reserve, visitors are invited to discover opportunities for personal growth through access to creative activities and connecting with nature.

With a particular understanding of disabilities and mental ill-health, they run a diverse programme, Flourish, designed to benefit the whole person – promoting physical, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing.

The focus of this is on a volunteering project of approximately 6 months where participants will join a team for one day a week and gain practical hands-on experience, skills and knowledge in conservation and horticulture. In addition, there is a programme of activities aimed at improving individual's wellbeing.

The aim of the project is that over the course of a number of months each participant's wellbeing, resilience, confidence, self-esteem, skills and motivation will have all improved.

Throughout the process goal setting and future planning processes are factored in with an aim that at the end of their time with Flourish, participants are in a better position to move forward onto further volunteering opportunities, work experience or further education.

Holton Lee welcomes as a volunteer anyone living with a disabling physical or mental factor that has an adverse impact on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities. Ideal candidates for the Flourish project are individuals that are not currently in education, employment or training. Since it started, in 2011, Flourish has supported 200 individuals. They have been people living with a wide variety of complex conditions, including brain injury, anxiety, physical disability, learning disability and dementia.

30-40 people are currently attending Holton Lee for one day a week, for four months initially. Often people come feeling they need to be looked after or that they are of no help to society. Here they find a job to do: They grow produce for sale to the public, carry out conservation work and also take part in the other activities provided on the estate. With support from qualified and experienced staff they are able to improve their practical and life skills.

Regardless of the condition that brought them to the project, one factor unites the group: The need for support to improve and maintain a good sense of wellbeing.

### **Connecting People**

New people to the project first meet with a member of the team and their needs are assessed. An action plan is put together and they are invited for a trial day. If they are happy with the experience they are accepted onto the project, which has a family feel. Daily groups are made up of 8-10 people with exceedingly diverse needs and immediately everyone is welcoming. In a way, nobody "fits in" and so everybody does. Working together on the project side by side helps build relationships around a common purpose. There are further opportunities to socialise in breaks and with the wider group at events like the Christmas dinner, barbecues, trips and open days. Regular coffee mornings and open days for the public where project participants can communicate all the work they have been achieving on the project help too. These connections with the community beyond Holton Lee help support individuals' journeys when moving on from the project.

Holton Lee has developed strong wellbeing measurement tools with the help of health professionals. These are used at 2 and 4 month reviews and 90% of their service users reported an increase in social networks.



"I have definitely made friends here"

"I like helping people. Some of my best friends are at Holton Lee. I like it here – we're a funny bunch!"

## Learning

The first point in each individual's application/referral process is to establish what they want to achieve on the project, what their strengths are and what they have an interest in. The project has also observed that when individuals use their skills and interests to teach others their sense of accomplishment and confidence improve also. The Flourish project runs on the premise that everyone has something to learn and everyone has something to teach.



There are horticultural skills and business skills around the market garden to learn and share with each other and, in the afternoon, there are activities such as nature walks, bird watching and deer spotting, painting, cooking and creative writing. Depending on the season, various making projects are carried out, for example constructing Reindeers out of logs for the Christmas sale. New skills can be learnt and transferred to other situations. Opportunities for the development of social skills occur naturally in the course of the work and activities. In a snapshot of last year's monitoring: 16% reported improving in just one horticultural skill. 84% reported an increase in more than one horticultural skill. 22 % reported improving in one life skill and 78 % reported an increase in more than one life skill.

"I talk to you guys now sometimes. I used to just explode."

## Being Active

All therapeutic programmes include being active: gardening, walking, digging, cutting gorse, weeding, pine pulling, watering and harvesting are examples. For many volunteers, taking part in this work means that there is a big change in their activity levels when they join the project.



Pedometers are available so that people can track their activity and there are sometimes mini challenges to see who can walk the most in a day. The new Holton Lee Trim Trail can also be accessed by Flourish volunteers. There is a basketball hoop to play on and space to kick a football around at lunchtime for volunteers who want to get involved.

## Taking Notice

The nature reserve and the kitchen garden provide many informal opportunities to take notice of the living surroundings, but mindfulness skills are encouraged and also taught at the centre. The staff team includes a mindfulness teacher.

The environment has been developed to encourage all to take notice; of the variety of things grown, the changes of the seasons, the soil between the fingers and the sunshine on the back when gardening, or the flames of a gorse fire on the heath. Care has been taken with accessibility and there are many seats around the walkways and paths and in the bird hides, where people can watch for hours. A 250-metre-long wheelchair labyrinth has been built with a tap trail so that it is also accessible for visually impaired people.

Discussions during induction and reviews help participants to take notice and reflect on their own needs and progress and what they want to do next. The project has learnt that each individual's wellbeing journey fluctuates and is different from the next. Some people make progress in a few weeks, some need a lot longer, sometimes a person's wellbeing just begins to improve as their journey at Holton Lee is coming to an end.

A snapshot of wellbeing improvement monitoring over one year of the project shows 79% of participants showing a high level of improvement, 18 % showing significant improvement and 3% showing a slight improvement.

## Giving

Giving to each other is central to the project and volunteers are encouraged to work together and teach each other skills. Everybody is valued and everyone's contribution is important. This year's Christmas Lectures event is a chance for absolutely anyone in the group to share their interests and knowledge. The programme is very diverse, including a service user talking about his enthusiasm for cars, followed by a member of staff talking about her PhD project.



There are chances for the general public to give as well, either as an independent volunteer or through donating money or time. Corporate volunteering is also available. Holton Lee receives funding through the lottery, trusts and fundraising activities. Their Patron is Princess Anne, who attends some events. Holton Lee currently has 64 volunteers in all.

Local people and organisations donate raffle prizes, art and craft materials, wood, plant pots, seeds and other materials to help the project. Some participants are taken to the project's rural location by volunteer drivers.

Flourish encourages its participants to give through their work: Excess vegetables are donated to local food banks and wreaths and Christmas decorations are given to local charities or schools.

One thing that all participants are able to give back is their opinion. Flourish is user-led. Everyone's thoughts count and large scale consultations with service users are an opportunity for everyone to have their say and make their contribution to how the project develops. In this way people benefitting from the project are helping to frame the Flourish experience for future participants.



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Bournemouth CVS and Poole CVS are working with Public Health Dorset to support local voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations to deliver better public health outcomes. This project is to help the sector measure and demonstrate the impact their work has on health and wellbeing in their communities. These case studies are designed to highlight the varied and substantial impact VCSE organisations have on the Five Ways to Wellbeing. The Five Ways to Wellbeing is a tool comprising of a set of five, evidence based public health indicators about the kinds of activities that individuals can do that are known to improve their health and wellbeing: Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give.

To learn more about the work of the Bournemouth and Poole VCSE sector please contact Liz Cooper 01202 682046, [liz.cooper@poolecvcs.org.uk](mailto:liz.cooper@poolecvcs.org.uk)

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