Nature's helping hand: tackling isolation in care



In the north-east of Scotland, National Lottery funding has been awarded to a pioneering project which uses nature to tackle isolation and loneliness among care home residents.

It is well known that contact with nature can help people feel happier and more energised, create an increased sense of meaning and make tasks seem more manageable.

> “You’re not just looking at four walls. It’s getting that push to get out. It builds your stamina up and makes you feel a lot better. It takes the loneliness away.”
>
> Sheila, care home resident

That’s why environmental education charity Wild Things has developed Silver Saplings, an intergenerational project which has received a £475,700 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Silver Saplings uses nature activities to improve mental and physical health while also caring for some of Scotland's most fragile natural heritage. Running for over four years across Moray, Inverness, Aviemore and Fochabers, it is expected to help over 3,000 vulnerable people.

With the struggles and anxieties caused by coronavirus (COVID-19), there has never been a more crucial time to focus on physical and mental wellbeing.



Walking in nature

Getting outside

Luke Strachan, CEO of the charity, said: “At Wild Things, we know first-hand that engaging with the natural world has powerful transformative and restorative qualities, no matter what age you are.”

Once COVID-19 restrictions are relaxed, project activities for socially isolated elderly people will include rock pooling, pond dipping, osprey and dolphin spotting, as well as nature-based crafts and beach walks.

For care home residents with restricted mobility there is a programme of nature-based activities within the care home setting, such as making bird feeders and planting native seedlings. These activities are designed to exercise cognitive abilities, fine and gross motor skills, hand-eye coordination and concentration.

Sheila, one of the care home residents, said: “You’re not just looking at four walls. It’s getting that push to get out. It builds your stamina up and makes you feel a lot better. It takes the loneliness away.”



Taking part at the care home

Caroline Clark, Director Scotland of The National Heritage Lottery Fund, said: “The last three months have been a struggle for most people and many of us have recognised the benefits that connecting with nature can bring, lifting our mood and making us feel less stressed and more energised.

“I’m delighted we can help those who haven’t been able to get out-of-doors enjoy all that it has to offer, forging new friendships, learning new skills and helping look after their beautiful landscape.”

Supporting heritage during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

Have you applied for support yet?

The National Lottery Heritage Fund is committed to helping the heritage sector through this crisis.

Our £50million Heritage Emergency Fund is open until 12noon on 31 July for grants from £3,000 - £250,000. We want to support as many organisations as we can. Submit an application before the deadline so we can help your organisation too.

Additional support includes:

- Digital Skills for Heritage: increasing sector skills and confidence to bring heritage to more people
- maintaining our financial commitment to all of our 2,500 existing projects
- help and advice from our UK-wide teams

Find out more.

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