

Tallaght Adult Mental Health Services - Woodlands for Health Group

Opportunities



Overview

Woodlands for Health is a 12-week guided walking programme designed to support the mental health and well-being of adults engaged with mental health services across Ireland. By integrating nature into the recovery journey, the initiative provides a sustainable and accessible approach to mental health care. In Tallaght, the programme was established through collaboration between an Occupational Therapist from Tallaght Adult Mental Health Services, the Dublin Mountain Partnership, the HSE Health Promotion and Improvement Officer, and national partners including Mental Health Ireland, Coillte, and Get Ireland Walking.

A total of 23 service users participated in the inaugural group, aged 23 to 55. Of these, 56.4% had a diagnosis of psychotic disorders, while others presented with depression (15.4%), bipolar disorder (10.3%), and anxiety (7.7%). Over the course of 12 weeks, participants visited twelve locations, beginning in local parks and progressing to more challenging routes in the Dublin Mountains, including Cruagh, Hellfire, Tibbradden, Carrickgolligan, and a walk from Ticknock to the Gap. Participants reported a range of positive outcomes, including increased physical activity, improved social connection, greater motivation, enhanced mood, better mental well-being, more structured daily routines, the development of friendships, and a deeper connection with nature.



Location:
Dublin



Project Lead:
Tallaght Adult Mental Health Services



Cost:
€3,724.50 (bus, sandwiches, lunch on last day)

Tags:
Walking trails,
Hiking/Hillwalking
Nature connection, Mental Health
People with a disability



Objective

- **Guided Walks:** Participants embark on weekly walks through various forest settings, led by experienced guides and supported by mental health professionals.
- **Inclusive Approach:** The programme welcomes individuals of all fitness levels, with walks tailored to accommodate diverse abilities.
- **Social Connection:** Beyond physical activity, the programme fosters a sense of community, encouraging social interaction and support among participants.
- **Educational Components:** Walks often include discussions on local flora and fauna, promoting environmental awareness and mindfulness.
- **Improved Mental Health:** In previous studies, participants have noted improved mental wellbeing, reduced anxiety, and improved mood and we hoped to achieve similar results.
- **Resources:** Transport, lunch and merchandise were provided weekly.

Challenges

Maintaining consistent attendance over a 12-week programme can be challenging, particularly within a mental health setting. Participants may experience relapses or fluctuations in their mental health, which can impact motivation and engagement.

Securing sustainable funding also presents an ongoing challenge. While sufficient funding had been raised in previous years to support the delivery of two programmes, the need for continued financial support remains essential for long-term sustainability.

Actions to support environmental sustainability

Environmental awareness was reinforced throughout the programme, with weekly discussions on the Leave No Trace principles. The Dublin Mountain Partnership played a key role in supporting and promoting this aspect.

To minimise environmental impact, group transport was provided via a weekly bus service. Participants were also encouraged to use Local Link bus services independently at weekends to revisit locations explored during the programme.

Solutions

Efforts were made to address attendance rates by issuing weekly text reminders 24 hours in advance. Participants were also provided with a contact number to notify the facilitator if they were unable to attend, allowing for appropriate support to be offered where needed.

In addition, engagement has been established with Active South Dublin to explore opportunities for future funding and potential ongoing support for the programme.



More information

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Feedback

12 out of 12 participants reported that they plan to keep up walking after the group ends.

"I enjoyed the walks and discovering new places and scenery. Very supportive environment."

"I enjoyed the whole thing. I enjoyed being in nature, making new friends and having conversations with everyone."

"Nice to go and see different places that are usually not accessible to me cause I don't have a car"

"Love being out and about in our beautiful country. It was a really good group of people. The team leaders really made it so much easier".

"I walk more now instead of sitting around"

Participants on the Programme