Josh: Hello and welcome to ‘Third Sector Insights’, the knowledge and learning podcast from The National Lottery Community Fund. I’m Josh Coles-Riley, and I work for the Fund in the Knowledge and Learning team.

We’ve created ‘Third Sector Insights’ to give a platform to organisations funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, to share the knowledge and insight they’ve gained through their projects. Each episode, you’ll hear directly from third sector leaders, project staff, volunteers, and the people and communities they support. We’ll talk to them about their projects and the difference our funding makes, and about key lessons, challenges, mistakes and successes – basically any learning that might be helpful to other groups and organisations seeking to make a difference in their communities.

Each episode will focus on a different topic – an area of special or topical interest, or maybe a challenge or experience that lots of third sector organisations have in common. We don’t want this podcast to be about us as a Funder giving our position or saying, “this is the view of The National Lottery Community Fund on x”. Instead, Third Sector Insight (the clue’s in the name!) is about drawing out the wealth of insights, wisdom and experience third sector organisations are gaining through the projects we fund.

On this episode, we’ll be heading out of the office to join to pay a visit to an organisation whose National Lottery funded project is unlocking the power of green spaces to help people and communities to thrive.

We’ll be in Pontypool in Torfaen to meet with Growing Space, who are using National Lottery funding to provide green spaces and environmental activities alongside bespoke training and personal development to support people in their transition from the criminal justice system or from forensic mental health hospital settings.

We’re here on a surprisingly sunny September day at Growing Space allotment just outside Tal-y-Garn psychiatric ward in the county hospital in Pontypool. I'm here with Glyn and Gavin from Growing Space. Do you want to just introduce yourselves?

Gavin: My name is Gavin Mote. I'm the Operations Manager of Growing Space.

Glyn: I'm Glyn Mathews. I'm the project supervisor for the project at Tal y Garn allotments

Josh: Brilliant. Thank you very much for working at welcoming us your allotments. today it's them I think our listeners will hear the lovely birdsong and realise it's a very peaceful and nice place but they won't be able to see this really impressive allotment with loads of veg, flowers and a polytunnel looking really nice area so it's a lovely place to be. I'm already appreciating that. You've set up this allotment as part of your National Lottery funding project. Do you want to tell us a bit about that?

Gavin: Yeah we were lucky enough to win some National Lottery funding in a couple of years ago to work with people who were suffering from serious mental ill-health and the hardest to reach people in our society people from also from a forensic background and that's worked really well because what we've done is in a number of locations now we've set up projects that link directly with hospitals and NHS staff they then refer into us and we do activities like environmental engagement or the cultural therapy trained in craft work work indoors so that would be anything from digital-inclusion packages we do a little bit of training there on how can use a tablet safely, art work but mainly focus on environmental activity acts obviously we want to get people out and fresh air learning to grow things learning out to cook and eat healthily. The aim of the project is to support people with their well-being and then we have a transition in officer called Mark Richardson when people are discharged from hospital he links in with them and supports them once they’re out in the community as well so we're now supporting people from a part of their illness where the most acutely ill right the way through to when they are almost fully recovered however long that takes which is great and the National Lottery allowed us to work with people in this setting as opposed to just in the community so we've now got to focus on developing and supporting people through every stage of their recovery.

Josh: And what's your role in that Glyn?

Glyn: I'm actually supervisor for this particular project, I'm hands on and deal with the claims that come along with patients it's just that I have here at the moment they've already shy and nervous when he first came when one of the chaps had just lost his wife he was at a very low ebb and couldn't get himself back into work, he's come along and he's been here for about a year now and he’s full of confidence, he’s now joking and he's

now looking for full employment so that's definitely a bonus for us just really good to see people they've all become really good friends they say they were already nervous when they came along, you create some great friendships you're not just doing horticulture, it’s a social thing as well.

Josh: Awesome. It's really nice to hear those stories. Oh, it's just started to rain so that's great! Let’s rewind a little bit, Gavin can you tell us a bit about how the idea for the project came about?

Gavin: We worked in partnership with the NHS now for quite a few years and one of the occupational therapists worked in a psychiatric ward called Pill Mawr ward at the time Janine Green and myself, and our director Bill started having discussions about setting up some activity actually in the hospitals and that was something we were we were keen to do so we wrote a bid and applied to the National Lottery for some funding to support us with that. We submitted the bid for a couple of years in a row and after a few years we were lucky enough to run a little pilot and it was quite successful and after a few years we were lucky enough to get some National Lottery funding to support us, it’s been great.

Josh: The National Lottery Community Fund one of our big themes is people in the lead and that's something we look for in all applications and you described this group of people in here is some of the hardest people to reach so how did you address that in involving them in the development of your project idea.

Gavin: We were really lucky because we linked in with NHS staff and a lot the NHS staff are really keen to work alongside us as a mental health charity so we started doing consultations with in-patients, patients and communities and our service users, our existing in service users and then that's when we found out about the need for the project and what they were looking for and got things from their perspective and like I say the occupational therapists we work alongside have been a big help in the consultation process as well.

Josh: Can you be a bit more specific about the kinds of things that people in the hospital were telling you about?

Gavin: One of the things that was really most alarming for me was that some of the people in psychiatric wards weren't going out. They were they were staying in their rooms, also the corridors some of the designs of the older hospitals, the corridors very strict so people can only walk back or forward in straight lines to rooms and things and there's very little exercise. People have are very low motivation so what we wanted to do is get people outside, start creating paths are a bit more, I know it sounds a bit simple, were a bit more curved so people could walk around a nice area around a garden designing some

therapy and sensory boarders, and some areas for people to grow to engage interest and really just getting people out to the wards so that they could walk around a green environment and that would hopefully help with a well-being. It's just sort of escalated from there where we've developed more activities indoor especially in the winter and the poor weather we do a lot more craft work and work doing Christmas crafts and willow weaving and art therapy stuff so it's just sort of evolved but the main the main thing was for me was that when people are in in a psychiatric ward we want them to be able to achieve something, maybe learn a new skill if they flip for it be able to use in the outdoor spaces and really nice outdoor spaces within the wards or next to the wards and have that extra service while they're under Section really and staying in the ward. And then like we say there's a transition in program then where once you discharged from hospital we can support them in the community as well, which is working really well.

Glyn: One of the things I noticed when I go into the hospitals, I set some garden projects up inside the courtyard gardens. I take the patients out in the courtyard garden and they love it they really work together. Some these patients have never even

Spoken, then they start working together maybe even even form relationships and

just doing the same activity, and it's really rewarding to see speaking each

only engaging with each other so it's not just the obvious social service.

Josh: That's one of the things that I was really interested in about this project so it's called Open Spaces, Open Minds, right? And that seems to draw a really clear link between the outdoors and well-being. Can you tell me a bit more about that and how that works in the context of working with forensic mental health patients.

Gavin: Basically we again we've got a close relationship with the occupational therapists of work on the wards, and then because all our staff are quite highly trained in horticulture and worked in the in the industry for quite a long time we then, and again under consultation, develop activities that people can engage in outdoors. For example with this program we linked in with in-patients and said, “look if you add an allotment area or garden area, what would you like to do in that area?”. So some people said, “well I'm not physically very well so I'd like to have an area that I could sit down in and contemplate and an area that looks nice and colourful.”. Other people said, “I'd love to learn to grow vegetables so maybe I could do that myself one day.” Other people wanted to

learn how to cook healthily, grow things from seed, and some people just wanted to

get out of the ward because they felt to get out and get some fresh air

would be beneficial. So after our consultation then we set up the Tal-y-Garn allotment and some gardens in St Cadog’s hospital as well, and directly linked in with the occupational therapist to develop a program where people come to us a couple

of times a week, once or twice a week through for a good couple of hours just

to just have a change of scenery, fresh air, like Glyn mentioned earlier

working alongside each other to promote friendships and teamwork. Some of the work we've had to do here has been quite heavy in terms of the allotment was overgrown when we first started now it's well cultivated, there’s a polytunnel, there’s a shed. We started to develop this sensory area which has got a nice bench and a sensory border which is nice bright and colourful which we looking to develop further especially next spring. It grows as you go along so there's lots of different activities and things that happen through consultation and it definitely, especially as the occupational therapists can see, that it definitely benefits patients to come out, have that a couple of hours a week where they're working in this environment that we've created.

Glyn: Some of the patients at St Cadog’s; the other week I was growing potatoes with them, and they were amazed at that’s where potatoes came from, some of them weren’t even aware that’s where potatoes came from. So they took their potatoes and went to make cheese and potato pie and they were overwhelmed by it. Also one lady in particular said, “I can't wait to get home and make sure I’m going to plant some potatoes”, so

it's installed in well-being for the future as well.

Josh: That's really lovely to hear so the project itself is nearly two years in, how would you describe the journey the project's gone on in the last two years?

Gavin: I think for us we hit the ground running because we've done a lot of consultation with the occupational therapist in the wards and we've set up a little pilot to see if it would be successful. But for me the way it's evolved is that we started off just looking to get people engaged in outdoor activity in that in the open spaces to develop them and about their well-being and now it’s snowballed into… we're running courses on the wards, we do a lot of crafts stuff, we’re doing Christmas crafts this year, and everyone loves making things for Christmas which they can sell or give to their families. At the moment we currently running a digital-Inclusion course which is how to use a tablet safely and things like that. We've set up a woodworking shop in St Cadog’s so people go and work in a little workshop now and they restore furniture from the wards. They make bird boxes for estates, for NHS estates, they do little jobs like restoring benches for the Health Board. So they’re learning transferable skills when they leave the hospital again they can they'll have some skills to move forward with. The health eating things evolved as well; we started off just wanting to teach people how to grow vegetables and healthy produce. Now that's turned into a little social enterprise which is a little café which is open a couple of days a week where people can come, learn how to cook healthily and eat a healthy meal. So it's evolved really, really nicely just from that “Open Spaces, Open Minds” concept into lots of different things and that's only in the space of two

years and it has been great.

Josh: Has anything surprised you about the project?

Gavin: What surprised me is the demand. Every hospital in Gwent (because we’re a Gwent-wide organization at the moment), and every hospital in Gwent now wants to work with us and this has been identified as a model of good practice not just by NHS

nurses and occupational therapists but senior nurses that have come down to see the project, and the head of the NHS has also commented on what a great project it is. So for me the surprise is the actual demand now. How do we roll the service out to every hospital in Gwent over the next couple of years, because that’s what they want us to do.

Glyn: When I first went to the ward, it was all people just sitting doing the same jigsaw puzzles and the same colouring books so it must be so welcoming to them to see us going there with so many different options. The feedback is amazing, they’re really enjoying it.

Gavin: There's a lot it was previously was a lot of sedentary behavior in the wards people would wake up late to watch TV and then go back to bed, that’s pretty much it, and some of those people are now coming out working outside working on an allotment doing some

Courses, doing a bit of training, doing some taster sessions or working in the woodworking

Shop - all either next to their ward or in the hospital and I think

that's just great because I think the more you can provide people

when they're not particularly well and walked it you can provide them

to support their well-being, the better.

Josh: And when people are well enough to leave hospital the project travels with them can you explain a bit more about that?

Gavin: Growing Space the mental health charity was set up in

1992 to work with adults with mental ill-health. We started off with

adults with more mild to moderate people that would get referred into by the community mental health teams. Previously to the Lottery funding we weren't doing any work in the actual hospitals, so we'd only work with people with mental health problems in the community. What's happened now is people have being discharged from hospital or we working with them in hospital, we've then got a transitioning officer who's there to support them into our community projects. Now these people we'd normally miss so when they get discharged from hospital they may go back into their home, feel maybe isolated again they wouldn't know what services were out there, they may not leave the house because obviously they're a bit sort of they may have social anxiety and they may struggle

leaving the home. So that little support network’s in place now to say, “look don't

don't stay at home on your own. There’s support out there, there's an officer who

will support you into projects to get you through the door and then you meet

people who have been through similar problems to yourself that will support you and

develop your skills further if you want to do training or if you want to just

come somewhere where you can meet new people and socialize there's lots of

different options out there.”, and we don't just transition into our own charity we

transition into anyone we feel will benefit that individual so I think the

fact that people can have that support whereas it wasn't they before we had the Lottery Fund means that a lot of these people are now not getting missed, it’s crucial. And the other thing is when they missed and they become isolated in they stay at home very often they become ill again and then it’s like that circle of going back to your mental health team maybe becoming ill again maybe being sectioned again or going back to you GP constantly. So we will also help in to try and break that that cycle of healthcare professional dependence by hopefully referring people into projects that are going to support them throughout the week and get them a little bit better on the road to recovery.

Josh: So it's quite a complicated project in terms of there's lots of different

Elements, and as you've also been explaining, it's been evolving, you're

trying different things. What are the key lessons you've learned in that?

Gavin: The key lessons for me our partnership work; if we didn't have that partnership with the NHS we wouldn't work. So a lot of organisations will just focus on themselves what they need to deliver for a particular bid and deliver what they have to do for the outcomes of the bid. Whereas I think Growing Space, we've always instilled that it's about partnership work because that benefits people more so if we can work more closely with the NHS more closely, with other third sector organisations that can provide a bigger, wider service to support people then that's what we're going to do. And the lottery helped us with that, but I think it's really important when you’re setting the project up to look at partnership working and making sure that the people that attend and benefit from your the program have everything available to them and that's what partner partnership work can do. We were lucky enough last year to win the NHS partnership award for this project and that just highlights to me how important that is.

Josh: With the partnership working site, have there been any challenges to that has it been plain sailing?

Gavin: Yeah, initially we were finding that people didn't know

about the projects so we had to go out and promote it; that's been very

important. Referrals were slow because you know that's the nature of things with

mental health people obviously lack motivation and if they don't know what

the project is they may not attend. But again, having that partnership with the NHS and having occupational therapists and community psychiatric nurses, etc, telling people all about the project as well and helping to get to the project has been a big help. So yeah, the challenge has been getting people through the door, getting people referred to the program, and again, that partnership work has helped with that, and obviously advertising the project's through potential referrers.

Josh: What advice would you give to another charity that was embarking on this kind of similarly complex, multi-agency project?

Gavin: I would say set up potentially set up a steering group so consult with health care professionals, find out what they want, obviously talk to the participants that are going to be potentially engaging in the program in our case people on the wards, people were mental ill-health in the community, and that consultation process is quite important because you get some really good ideas off healthcare professionals or potential clients who you will be working with. So don't be afraid to work in partnership; again, I can't emphasise how important that is - I've seen a lot of projects have been doing this a long time now 16 years now and I've seen a lot of projects fail over the years because people are quite precious about their projects and they want to just run it themselves that partnership work is essential to the success of a program especially with us we work with people with mental health ill health primarily so it's really important we have that strong partnership with the Aneurin Bevan health board across Gwent, and just making sure you consult, you set up steering group, you plan things, and you promote and market your programme when it starts to all the right people.

Josh: You talked a bit already about how the project's evolved and you've been trying different things, has there been anything you tried that didn't work, or have have you made any mistakes along the way?

Gavin: yeah I think Glyn will agree me on this when we first started we were trying to do a lot more Green engagement during the winter months and sometimes we'd be snowing and sleeting and people were like, “look I'm not I'm not coming off the ward today because the weather's dreadful”, so this is why we started to develop more services actually in the wards so things like propagation, as I mentioned earlier the craft stuff, the art stuff, the digital-inclusion stuff that people want to do so we started evolving from just a green open spaces, open mind program to having whole package working inside and outside.

Josh: What are your plans for the future of the project after our funding comes to an end?

Gavin: I would absolutely love to see this project be extended across the whole of Gwent. I think it's a really valuable project it's really worked well with the hospitals we are working in partnership with at the moment, and it's working well with the community mental health teams also. A number of senior people on the health board have expressed an interest in us extending this program across as many hospitals as possible. I'd love to see horticultural therapy and green engagement become a medical intervention, I think horticultural therapy is right up there for me in terms of how much it supports people. I'd like to see this become something that's national so we do this across every borough, and for me it's really important that horticultural therapy becomes a medical intervention in the future because I see massive benefits to people; everything from just teamwork, meeting new people, socialising, the therapy of being around plants, growing things, learning healthy eating, growing vegetables and learning what to do with those things. A lot a lot more research is coming out to say the diet is closely related to mental health and that’s becoming more and more obvious now as time goes by that we all need to look after our mental health through exercising and diet and that's two things a horticulture and green activities do. So I’d just love to see this rolled out right across Wales to support as many people as possible because we can see the benefits here – it’s really tangible.

Glyn: There’s evidence in that, with the patients that come and say, “sorry, I don’t like horticulture, I don’t like gardening”, and they come out with a little persuasion and they’re enthralled by it straight away.

Gavin: It's not you know, Glyn said it's not about having an interest in the horticultural side and all the other things that come with that. So it's the fresh air, the getting a bit more fitter and healthier, learning how to grow things, to cook with. We do a really nice allotment curry recipe which is spinach, grow some nice butternut squash, potatoes, peppers, garlic with some spices, and everyone loves that. We've had two hospitals coming along a couple massive pot of that and everyone loves the allotment curry, and it’s really healthy so a little recipes like that. We've now got Rachel who is a qualified nutritionist works in a social enterprise up the road and she can give people a healthy recipe so they know what to do for example in gardening, and you always find you get a glut of tomatoes or a glut of leeks so it’s really handy to know that with a glut of

tomatoes you can do some nice roast tomato soup or make a nice tomato and

herbs sauce for pasta or whatever, because a lot of people don't

know what to do with vegetables and then obviously people are getting that

vitamin C and the healthy things in them as well.

Josh: And when you mentioned the word evidencing the benefits early and I suppose with your ambitions for the future of the project as well, I guess the health boards would be the audience that the kind of evaluation of the project be quite important for. Can you tell me a bit about how you're approaching that?

Gavin: Yeah, well Glyn does a lot of work on that as well we've got a database called Lamplight so Glyn will record everyone he works with, what their mental health is on the day, what activities they've done. We also use the Warwick Edinburgh recording scale which records people's well-being at the start of the project and after six months we record the numbers for that throughout each month to see if the numbers improve on this mental health scale, so that's recorded. We could record things on the database, we take pictures as well; photographic evidence is really powerful and the other thing we do which is really good as we do case studies so if someone's willing to we’ll sit down and we'll have a chat to them and write the case about what they're doing and how the program's benefited them, so we've got a number of case studies now and a really good one from the lottery of a gentleman from St Cadog’s who says that the program's helped him not just with his mental health but he now has a better relationship with his family because he's going home and cooking things with the produce he's made, and that's helped with his relationships and things like that. We’ve got lots of great case studies, that's how we document and record things.

Josh: Okay I'm just gonna ask one one more question what are you most proud of in your time on the project?

Glyn: Everything to be honest with you but I’m more proud of how the guys get on and respond to each other because as we said, I can remember the first time that one person came, he couldn’t even look at me because he was so anxious and nervous. He’d just lost his wife, he was out of work and now he’s the life and soul of the party and to just see that evidence and the relationship they build with each other it's just so rewarding. So that would be the thing I’m most pleased of.

Josh: I think that's really nice note to end on and thank you so much it's been a real privilege to hear about the difference our funding’s making.

Thank you you've been listening to Third Sector Insights, the knowledge and learning podcast from The National Lottery Community Fund. The projects you heard about in this episode is one of 11,000 funded every year across the UK with money raised by National Lottery players. To find out more about Growing Space you can visit their website at [www.growingspace.org.uk](http://www.growingspace.org.uk).

Earlier in 2019, The National Lottery Community Fund announced a Climate Action Fund to support communities in the UK to take local action on climate change. To find out more go to [www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/climate-action-fund](http://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/climate-action-fund). We'd love to know what you think of this podcast, please let us know by leaving us a review or you can email me your thoughts directly at Joshua.Coles-Riley@tnlcommunityfund.org.uk. Thanks for listening

to Third Sector Insights, keep a look out for future episodes where we'll continue

to talk with third sector organisations and find out what knowledge learning and

insights they're gaining through projects funded by the National Lottery