

## **Ten Directions Year 2 – Ecotherapy Project**

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## **Introduction**

- This project started in October 2021 and is ongoing. The aim was to set up in private practice offering psychotherapy and ecotherapy, and to gain ecotherapy experience through volunteering.
- The first tranche of activities involved reading, training, a SWOT analysis of other eco/psychotherapy propositions (Appendix A) and a search for potential ecotherapy sites.
- In August 2022, the opportunity to gain experience in therapeutic horticulture at the Lindengate Community Garden arose. Also in August, I started 'slow walks' for wellbeing in my village. In September, I resigned from MIND to focus on setting up in private practice. I have also held two online ecotherapy sessions with my colleagues at EY.
- I have now published my website, developed processes and documentation for practicing and started to complete entries in on-line directories. The website offerings are in person and online psychotherapy and walk and talk ecotherapy.
- This document sets out my background, the Lindengate and Slow Walk activities, a summary of other activities and the mentoring process.

## **My background**

- I am a registered member of the UKCP, in the college of Outcome Oriented and Hypno-Psychotherapies. My modality is integrative and Eriksonian. I have been practicing psychotherapy since 2013 in a drugs and alcohol unit and with MIND. I completed Ten Directions year 1 and the PQC in the Other Centred Approach in 2021.

## **Lindengate Community Garden – NHS Staff Horticultural Therapy (15<sup>th</sup> August 2022) ([Home Page - Lindengate](#))**

### **Setting**

- Lindengate is a nature-based health and wellbeing charity based in Wendover. There are 6 acres of gardens divided into various sections including a sensory garden and orchard, with sculptures around the grounds. It is a safe enclosed environment used for programs across all age ranges and abilities. It is open all year round and there are shelters so the setting can accommodate most weather conditions. There are sufficiently wide pathways to take e.g., prams, pushchairs, or wheelchairs.

### **Framework**

- Lindengate is open to the public twice a week, there is also a range of organised programs. The program that I took part in is called Nature Connection. This is tailored for teams e.g., NHS staff, fire service, police. These sessions run for half a day per week for 6 weeks, or one-off. The group I joined was a one-off half day session for NHS staff from the local hospital. The session was the training ground to join further Nature Connection sessions. There has yet to be a follow up opportunity.
- On public days the gardens would be suitable for 'walk and talk' therapy. Although there would be other people around, there is adequate space to accommodate all. It is safe for the therapist and for the client. There are facilities, shelters, and a range of different types of open spaces to fuel creativity. There is also a yurt which could be used for groups.

## **Remit**

The remit is developed by the Nature Connection team. I met the leader on the day who took me through the planned activities. The activities were easy and informal and there was no pressure to join in. On the day, with a gentle nudge from the leader, the group self-organised and worked to their own timetable.

## **Needs assessment and research**

The remit of Nature Connection is to enable wellbeing from a stronger connection with nature, whilst learning techniques and skills that can be used in any setting. The program is well honed.

## **Place**

- The session was set in an open summer house in the kitchen garden. There was opportunity to explore the gardens, as well as to help with garden chores.

## **Risk**

- I wasn't involved in a risk assessment but noticed how carefully sharp items were counted out and in (scissors, secateurs). Hot drinks were available from thermos flasks rather than urns, which pose a threat from tipping over. Gloves were provided for 'dirty' jobs and tasks did not involve bending and lifting heavy objects.
- The registration form captures information on mental health, medical and physical issues that may affect safety and wellbeing. It also captures any specific support required e.g., for epilepsy, and for emergency contacts.
- Two members of staff were allocated for this session (there were other workers in the grounds). There were first aid kits available and good communications to raise an alarm if necessary. Overall, the garden was tidy without objects to trip over or thorny bushes hanging over pathways. Areas being worked on were cordoned off.

## **Working with other**

- This was my training day and so I took the lead from the staff. During the day I helped with organising the tasks whilst taking a back seat from team activities. It worked well. For example, whilst the team watered the garden, I filled the watering cans, whilst the team potted flowers, I refilled the compost containers.

## **Participants**

- Nature Connection is designed to support specific team needs. Lindengate are in alliance with local services to identify teams that would benefit from sessions e.g., the NHS team were nurses from the same ward at the local hospital.

## **Communications**

- Apart from the registration form, I am not aware of how the pre-session communications / contracting were made.
- Participants were given handouts about Lindengate's programs and open days. They were also given a mindfulness exercise and feedback forms. There were no handouts specific to the Nature Connection session.

## Process

- Participants arrived at 9.30am and stayed until 1pm. Initially, drinks were served, and the group settled into the summer house. The group all knew each other so introductions were brief. Whilst the team settled in, the leader explained the background of the garden and explained the aims of the charity and how it came to have the name of 'Lindengate' from the still existing Linden tree.
- The team were then led around the kitchen garden, identifying plants and trees as they went. The walk aimed to introduce the team to the layout of the garden and to explore the nature and wildlife.
- At a high point in the garden, the lead introduced an activity. She scattered cards on the ground containing words (e.g., furry, round, yellow, aromatic). The team then picked cards that appealed to them and searched in the garden for something that embodied the word. After 20 minutes or so the team assembled in the summer house for refreshments and sharing. They did this without being led. When the conversations subsided, the lead suggested the next activity.
- During the conversations I had been busy gathering and filling watering cans. The team then watered the kitchen garden. A simple but engaging activity and an opportunity to pick and eat the last of the fruit. The lead taught them how to get a good sprinkle from the cans. Afterwards the team regathered in the summer house, had lunch, and then engaged in the last gardening activity to pot up seedlings.
- During lunch we had prepared troughs of soil and the team potted up the seedlings. This activity was new to most; they learned this new skill with enthusiasm. They then brought together this activity and the watering skill learned earlier to water the plants.
- Exhilarated by their achievements, the team had a final round of refreshments and the leader helped them taste some of the other fruits from the garden e.g., rhubarb. Finally, after a round of discussions on the day, the team filled in feedback forms and prepared to pack up and leave.

## What happened?

- The day had been filled with chatter and laughter. New skills had been learned and everyone had contributed to all the activities. Explorations were followed by conversations and swapping photos. Unanimously, the planting activity was the favourite. Some of the team were more reserved than others, but with gentle encouragement everyone did a little of everything. The sharing of experiences was as important as the experiences themselves. They built stories of their explorations to share with others. We didn't get through all the planned activities, but the team needed to do things in their own time.

## Learnings and reflections

- Leading from behind – whilst leading team activities, the leader was not intrusive into these. Her leadership style was subtle and yet effective. Once activities had started, the team organised itself.
- Card exercise – this worked reasonably well although the team took a while to get started. I think one of the ecotherapy exercises e.g., stillness and connection, may have worked well. Alternatives could include runes, tarot or plant oracle cards.

- Grounding – a short grounding exercise may have set the frame for the day. Allowing space to settle and draw attention away from hospital work to connect with the environment.
- Simplicity – working cross culturally, nothing should be taken for granted e.g., knowing the difference between an apple and a pear. With encouragement, the team tried fruits they had not seen before e.g., purple apples.
- Closing – this felt awkward. The leader kept saying that it was a shame to close, but closure is necessary. The team had been given a mindfulness exercise to take away, but this could have been used to close the session.

## **Slow Walks around Wingrave Village**

### **Setting**

- Wingrave in Buckinghamshire is a thriving village of around 1800 people. It has a village school, a school for complex learning difficulties, community centre, church, shop, pub and garage. At the centre of the village is a large pond which used to be used for washing horses and carts. The village green leads onto the recreation ground (Rec) and croquet lawn. Around the boundary of the Rec are 19<sup>th</sup> century Tudor revival style Rothchild cottages, the children's playground, the church which dates to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the bowling green.

### **Framework**

- The walks during daylight start on the green where there are seats and wind round the circular Rec in either direction stopping at the benches by the children's playground. There are no access limitations, the gates are wide, and the ground is flat.

### **Remit**

- I joined the Wingrave rewilding group in March 2022. The aim of the group is to survey the local area, to get people out into nature and to rewild parts of the village. I volunteered for the bird surveys and to co-lead the walks with another therapist, Em Farrell.
- Our remit is 'a mix of walks, some with information and knowledge at their core and others allowing you a space to gently experience yourself and your surroundings'. The walks are not longer than an hour and at the pace of the slowest participant.

### **Needs assessment and research**

- It is evident from living here that there is an aging population. Whilst there are many exercise classes, there is a gap in provision for those that need a slower regime in nature combined with a wellbeing aim.

### **Place**

- The green and Rec are easily accessible and reachable as they are at the centre of the village. Both have benches for places to rest and are lined with trees, gardens and hedgerows. The Rec is a haven for birds including swifts, swallows, house martins and birds of prey. With the historic houses, church and graveyard, wildlife, and nature there is plenty to keep a slow walker engaged.
- Other areas of the village also have potential e.g., visiting the village ponds, pathways through the fields, the orchard and woods.

## **Risk**

- Whilst the ground is flat, the recreation ground can be muddy after heavy rain. The walks take place regardless of the weather (unless dangerous), but suitable footwear is required on muddy days.
- There is no registration form but, on the day, we ask if everyone is happy with the planned walk. People can join for as long as they want to, and we can walk participants home.
- At the centre of the village there is plenty of help at hand for emergencies e.g., houses around the green, church, pub, community centre. Em and I both carry mobile phones and there is a good signal.

## **Working with other**

- Whilst Em and I are both therapists, our approaches are different. Em's style is very open ended, see what happens. Mine is more structured. Our first two walks have followed Em's style. In December we are planning a history and myths walk and for this I will take the lead. The village is steeped in history e.g., the church, the Rothschilds. It also has at least one village tale that appears in the 1920s Highways & Byways Buckinghamshire book but dates to the 1700s.

## **Participants and communications**

- The user group is the local community. They are reached by advertising through the 'Wingrave Postie', an email that circulates news to the village. We also publish the schedule and a write up of the walks in the Wingrave Communique, the local newsletter. This gives a further marketing opportunity.
- There is no contracting with participants and participants take part at their own risk.

## **Process**

- This is the write up of the August walk. The September walk write up is in Appendix B, with a village map.
- This morning a small group of Wingravians took a slow walk around the village. Although all familiar with the village, a slow walk brings things to attention that otherwise would be missed. The morning air after the rain was perfect for starting our walk at the War Memorial on the village Green, stopping to identify the saplings [Black Locust] growing under the mature trees. People may not notice at a glance the bench donated by the Czech President and the rose bed commemorating the twinning of Wingrave with La Bouëxière in Brittany. Sauntering towards the Recreation Ground (Rec), we spotted a small murmuration of starlings in the sky behind the church. Sadly, the swifts have already left the church tower for Africa and the swallows are on their way, but there are plenty of other birds to be spotted around the Rec including pied wagtails.
- Making our way to the opposite side of the Rec, we viewed the impressively manicured bowling green lawn, complete with artificial snakes to scare the pigeons. Round past the pavilion, which is on the cards to be renovated, we made our way across Church Street to Wingrave's large and beautiful parish church, the Church of St Peter and St Paul, dating back to 1190 AD. Taking a moment to admire the magnificent Monkey Puzzle tree, we navigated

the church yard and made our way back to Church Street and wandered down towards the style at Lower End. It is worth a moment to visit the United Reformed Church's graveyard to read the fascinating inscriptions and admire a stand of beautiful sunflowers. Crossing the field to Mill Lane, there is an opportunity to pick up windfall apples and dream of apple pies and crumble.

### **What happened?**

- The second walk was better attended (5 vs 1) than the first and attracted a wider range of people resulting from an increase in publicity. The mix of age groups didn't impact the nature of the slow walk. We had people new to the village and those that had been here since childhood. The group stopped and started spontaneously, chatting to others on the way. The atmosphere was very relaxed. On both occasions after about an hour the participants dispersed in different directions.

### **Learnings and reflections**

- Marketing – our strategy for reaching people needs to be honed. Possibly an advertisement or cards in the village shop and post office, community centre, church, local coffee mornings, Women's Institute, and Parish Council.
- Schedule of walks for 2023 – whilst the village green and recreation ground provide safe and easily accessible areas for walking, to attract more people we need to rotate around different parts of the village.
- Other ideas for engagement:
  - If participants are very familiar with the area, then we may want to try and get them to see it through a different lens e.g., artist vs scientist vs historian.
  - For those not familiar with the village, invite a local historian.
  - To focus people, we could try a short grounding exercise to become present
  - Further engagement with nature e.g., one of the ecotherapy exercises.
  - If we have our resident experts from the wild project - what can they tell us about what we see and hear (birds, other wildlife, flora).
  - Encourage the participants to tell their stories of the village.

### **Ecotherapy Talks at EY**

- I was invited by two EY communities to give an hour's talk on ecotherapy (example pack in Appendix C). After an introduction to ecotherapy, the teams were invited to take part in a 15 minute 'Stillness and Connection' exercise which could be completed indoors or outside. The teams then shared their experiences. The pack was shared with additional exercises that could be completed individually. Feedback was good from both occasions. The plan is to build on these experiences to develop an online proposition.

**Psycho / Ecotherapy Website** [Feeling Free, Being Me Counselling – Buckinghamshire | Counsellor near the Chilterns and Online \(juliasamworth.com\)](#)

- The purpose of the website is to provide marketing my practice. I opted to have a company develop the site after reviewing the sites of other counsellors and ecotherapists.

- The site sets out expectations for services and gives information about my professional and personal life. The psychotherapy content was developed by from my approach to clients and the ecotherapy content from reviewing other ecotherapy websites.
- My target audience are adults in the local area or online in the UK.
- I will complete the launch of the site through the online directories by the end of December taking on clients from January. Developing further propositions will be a task for 2023.
- I am still searching for an appropriate therapeutic space, although I have identified safe sites for ecotherapy e.g., local Wildlife, National and Woodland Trust sites, Lindengate and a local 7-acre garden.

### **Mentoring**

- The initial group mentoring sessions were motivating as I felt in the same position as other people in terms of progress and issues. The tasks were thought provoking and helped to focus on ideas. Individual sessions with Stephen helped with initial shaping of thoughts, discussion on possibilities, website and project report reviews and ideas to take forwards. They were also helpful to identify strengths and areas for development. Broader support was provided by the Tariki counselling supervision group (e.g., by Fairlie on setting up in private practice) and my counselling supervisor (e.g., on contracting).

### **Summary**

Looking back to the early outline of my project (task 1 September 2021), I have achieved 2 out of 3 of the objectives although these are in early stages:

- Build a walk and talk therapy private business
- Build an online therapy and ecotherapy business
  - The walk and talk ecotherapy and online and face to face psychotherapy practice is set up and is in the process of being launched.
  - Online ecotherapy sessions have been held with my EY colleagues. These could easily translate into an online business.
- Occasional ecotherapy day groups
  - These groups are yet to be developed, although I have fledgling ideas for these based on the slow walks and therapeutic horticulture.

This is a journey which will adapt and shape as it progresses. Many of the initial hurdles have been crossed. I am looking forward to new clients and adventures.

**Word count 3182 excluding contents and appendix**



## Appendix

A – SWOT Analysis – see separate document

B - September walk published in the Wingrave Communique and village map

C – Example ecotherapy pack – see separate document

### Appendix B - September walk published in the Wingrave Communique and village map

#### Listening Walk

On a fine autumn morning, a small group gathered on the Green to go for a slow walk around the village. The Green, which used to be the centre of village life, was a good place for 3 ladies, a dad and daughter, Em and I to start our walk. The first sounds to listen to were the enthusiastic exchange of stories between participants. Some had been in the village for a long time, others were new residents. Em read a poem by President Václav Havel, the first post-communist President of the Czech Republic, who visited Wingrave as part of his state visit in 1998, to mark its Czech connections. He donated the bench to the village green that we were sitting on.

#### *It Is I Who Must Begin*

It is I who must begin.  
Once I begin, once I try —  
    here and now,  
    right where I am,  
    not excusing myself  
    by saying things  
would be easier elsewhere,  
without grand speeches and  
    ostentatious gestures,  
but all the more persistently  
    — to live in harmony  
with the “voice of Being,” as I  
understand it within myself  
    — as soon as I begin that,  
    I suddenly discover,  
    to my surprise, that  
I am neither the only one,  
    nor the first,  
nor the most important one  
    to have set out  
    upon that road.  
Whether all is really lost  
or not depends entirely on  
whether or not I am lost.

Guided by the discussion we wandered down Church Street to point out some of the village hubs to our new residents. There are always a lot of things to get involved with in the village, for example, events at the Community Centre, BBQs on Friday nights in the summer, bell ringing and tea and cake on Wednesdays, and Tea and Tots on Fridays (all set out in ‘the communiqué’). As we passed the

church, the bells were silent, but everyone agreed how lovely it was to hear them when they were being rung.

Turning onto the Recreation Ground, we stopped to hug a large tree. Listening to the autumn leaves underfoot, we picked up some windfalls to eat as we walked. Here we had the opportunity to welcome another 2 new residents to the village as they were finding their way around.

Crossing the Rec to the benches by the croquet lawn, we sat for a while watching the swallows and wagtails. I could imagine the sound of croquet being played. The Rec was made available to villagers by Hannah de Rothchild in 1876. From here there are views across the Chiltern Hills and we took time to admire the many picturesque mock Tudor houses.

Before we knew it, an hour had passed, and it was time to say farewell. No doubt we will meet again around the lanes in the village or on our next walk which is on 14<sup>th</sup> October at 2.30pm. Look out for information in the communiqué and on the village postie.

