

# Trees

breathing

living

growing

calming

## well being

energising

connecting

touching

talking

# People



**Therapi Project:**  
Increasing health and well being through contact with the green environment

*'Come, listen to the earth  
with us.  
For those who have  
learned  
to hear its song  
the earth can soothe  
the troubled heart,  
Refresh the weary,  
Soften the hardened,  
Redirect the lost.'*

*Steve Van Matre*

**To appreciate the links between Nature and preventive health** you only have to think back to the last time you took a good walk in the countryside or relaxed in the garden. Activities like this can be a great way to get fit and reduce stress.

**THERAPI** stands for **T**ackling **H**ealth **T**hrough **E**nvironmental **R**egeneration **a**nd **P**ublic **I**nvolvement, and is managed by the Project Officer Andy McGeeney, based at the Thames Chase Forest Centre in Upminster Essex.

It began as a 3 year project in July 2002, funded by the Countryside Agency as a REACT project. It operates in the London boroughs of Barking & Dagenham and Havering. Therapi is planning to extend its area of operations beyond the boundaries of Thames Chase Community Forest.

A steering group of health professionals, local authority and Countryside Agency staff representatives, and Thames Chase staff gives support and strategic direction to the Officer and the Project.

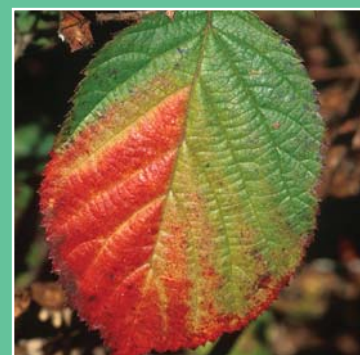
## **CORE AIMS**

- Change health professional's views of the green environment so that they see it as a positive resource with proven therapeutic benefits for their clients.
- Support local activities that improve people's psychological and physical health and well being within a green environment.
- Carry out research on the well being and health benefits of involvement in the countryside.

## Therapi confirmed the evidence of the benefits of well being in Nature

- Therapi doesn't feel like therapy it's enjoyable, and good for mind, body and soul at the same time.
- Most events are sociable times where new relationships are formed.
- People commit to green activities much more than they do to indoor gyms. Motivation and retention rates are high because it is enjoyable and can be carried out solitary or socially.
- Exercising in the countryside is natural, it doesn't feel like exercise but you get fit all the same.
- Being active in the countryside can feel pleasurable, calming, energising, fun rather than feeling 'I've got to get fit' or 'I feel bad I must lose weight'.
- Being busy in Nature lifts depression.
- People have an affinity with Nature that is positive and healing.
- Nature is free and low on resources; this work can save the NHS much needed money.
- Green Gym is better than Step Aerobics for exercising the heart.
- There are no expensive gym subscriptions or high tech exercise equipment.
- No one needs appointments, and Nature is available to nearly everyone.
- Green Therapy is applicable to the majority of conditions GPs meet in their surgeries.
- It is client led and encourages people to take more responsibility for their own health prevention and recovery.

# Therapi - increasing health & well being through contact with the green environment





*'The countryside can be seen as a great outpatient department whose therapeutic value is yet to be fully realised.'*

*Dr William Bird  
(inventor of Green Gym and  
Walking for Health)*

## CASE STUDIES

### Community, Health and Nature programmes

**A community park:** Working with a community group on the Mardyke estate in South Hornchurch, Therapi provided support for an extensive community consultation, asking how locals would like to see their immediate surroundings improved. They voted for a park and we set about helping them do it and raise £200,000 to pay for it.

**A green summer playscheme:** On the same estate Therapi, the local PCT and Havering sports department helped another group, of locals based at the primary school, to run a summer play scheme for two years. The children were offered a range of activities. They created a wildlife and vegetable garden, worked with artists and musicians, ate free healthy food at lunch and played sports games.

**The Plot On a housing estate in Romford:** Therapi hired Studio3Arts, a respected community arts company, to work with local children and adults over a year on the themes of the four seasons and four elements of earth, air, fire and water. They hired a garden allotment and used the land and growing things as a focus for a range of environmental art.

**Therapeutic gardens:** LIFT work with the NHS to build new health centres in the Havering and Barking & Dagenham area. We hired Jennifer Lauruol of Carpe Diem, a specialist landscape design company, and asked her to create two therapeutic gardens and supervise the design of six other grounds. The gardens have been planted out at no extra cost, are created to high sustainable standards and are of great benefit to wildlife and as well as people.

### Improving Individual Well Being programmes

**Green Gym** involves, after warm up stretching, a couple of hours of light conservation work supervised by a trained leader. This has been a great success with many patient groups and there is research evidence carried out at Brighton & Hove PCT by Oxford Brookes University, that Green Gym is very beneficial in providing regular physical exercise. It is better for the heart than step aerobics, has longer commitment rates than indoor gyms and has additional benefits by improving self esteem, lifting depression and providing socialising opportunities. There are obvious applications of Green Gym to a range of chronic conditions such as cardiac rehabilitation, type 2 diabetes, obesity, depression and stress.

**Walking in Nature:** Moderate exercise can reduce the risk of heart disease by 60%; more strenuous effort only has a marginal benefit. The main challenge is encouraging people to maintain commitment on a

regular basis; indoor gyms have a high drop out rate. Two projects were devised by Dr William Bird, a GP at Sonning Common Health Centre, to address the solution of mild physical exercise in a green environment. He encouraged his patients to walk in the countryside regularly and to take up voluntary conservation work. Walking for Health has now become a national initiative. Research evidence has accumulated which underscores Dr Bird's local successes.

Therapi has funded the production and printing of a [map pack](#) of short walks in local parks for people in the Barking and Dagenham area and a comprehensive Out and About map pack of all the sites in Thames Chase Community Forest, with advice on walking, cycling and horse riding. These are obtainable from the Forest Centre. Thames Chase will continue to promote access to its sites.

We also offer [guided walks for health](#) in woodland countryside. These are lead by someone who adds interest to the exercise activity by pointing out seasonal wildlife interest.

[Ecotherapy](#) is the use of guided experiences in Nature to increase a person's sense of well being. Therapi has plans to expand the range of ecotherapy activities for both the severely mentally ill and mild to medium condition mental health users.

### **Stress Reduction through Countryside Activities**

The first step for many people in taking responsibility for their own health and enjoying regular walks in the countryside is the removal of many of the barriers to getting pleasure from being outdoors in nature.

Thames Chase Community Forest has 40 sites with public access where it is possible to see an amazing variety of plants, birds and animals in relaxing surroundings. We are offering opportunities to inspire and educate people on how to appreciate our natural heritage while they go for walks. Therapi has run a series of programmes for ex-hospital mental health users over the past two years with very positive results.

A [research project](#) was commissioned to look at local peoples relationship to the green spaces of Thames Chase. A summary report is available from the office.

## **ECOTHERAPY ~ HEALING OURSELVES IN NATURE**

Our whole lives are intimately part of Nature. The food we eat and the air we breathe are from plants, our whole evolution and being is grounded in the natural world however much we now live in cities and towns. Many cultures live in harmony with the natural world and heal emotional distress through contact with Nature's elements of trees, animals and sacred places. Can we reconnect with the power of Nature and learn to appreciate and live by its beauty and truth?

The ecotherapy workshops are an opportunity to be outdoors in a natural place, a woodland where we can explore what Nature has to offer us: calmness, beauty, life changing and seasons returning. Ecotherapy allows us to get in touch with deeper natural processes and to acknowledge our place in the rhythms of life.





*'...when you talk about the problems, you tend to disempower people. You tend to make people feel that there is nothing they can do, that they are doomed, that there is no hope. I realized that to break the cycle, planting a tree is very simple, very easy - something positive that anybody can do.'*

Wangari Maathai

## MEDICAL RESEARCH EVIDENCE

### Research shows that :

- Access to gardens and green open spaces are linked to lower levels of mental disorder. (Kuo & Sullivan 2001)
- People maintain a better commitment to regular exercise if it takes place in a leafy environment. (Bird in Baines 1999)
- People's thinking capacity recovers from stress more rapidly after contact with nature. (Kaplan in Wolf 1998)
- Being able to see natural growth from a window can increase well-being and reduce work sickness absenteeism. (Kaplan in Wolf 1998)
- A view of a tree from a hospital bed significantly reduces a patient's stay. (Ulrich 1984)
- After as little as four minutes among trees a person's heart rate drops significantly. (Ulrich et al 1991)
- A Countryside Agency survey found that 9 out of 10 people value the countryside, the most important benefits were said to be 'a sense of relaxation and well being', and 'fresh air and peace and quiet' were also valued. (Countryside Commission 1997)

## HOW THERAPI IS EVOLVING

Therapi is growing and evolving ...

We have successfully developed a range of interesting and innovative green health projects, raised over a quarter of a million pounds in matched funding and ensured the Therapi Project will continue for the next few years. Examples of new initiatives we are planning are, a green gym type programme for cardiac rehabilitation patients and a range of outdoor activities for mental health users. After the successes of the past three years it is clear that Therapi has much to offer. We want to tell others about our work so they can try it for themselves and we want to work with more people and provide a better service. There are plans to develop our existing partnerships and offer the work of Therapi to others. We also have new ideas for enabling people to become healthier through contact with the green environment. Contact us if you would like to find out where we are going and how we might work with you.

**Thames Chase Community Forest** is an area of 44 square miles to the East of London. Since its inception 15 years ago it has doubled the amount of publicly accessible countryside and created miles of hard surface footpaths. Therapi is based at the main offices in Pike Lane, Upminster.

Thames Chase has as its remit the creation of a community forest, for the well being of people to the East of London. Central to this remit is the engagement of local people in taking advantage of such potential healthy opportunities on their doorstep. Thames Chase is in an ideal position to continue its catalytic and co-ordinating role through Therapi, of providing opportunities for improving people health and well being through outdoor activities.

There have been two major reviews investigating the relationship between the environment and physical activity. In summary, levels of total walking which meet the current requirements are more likely to be met when there is:

- Local access to public space or beach
- Local area is attractive with enjoyable scenery
- Safe Footpaths
- Minor traffic with trees
- Pavements
- Diversity of land use
- Easy access to public transport
- Neighbourhood is friendly

Thames Chase Community Forest meets these criteria.

*'Those who contemplate the beauty of the Earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.*

*There is a symbolic as well as actual beauty in the migration of birds, the ebb and flow of tides, the folded bud ready for spring.*

*There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature - the assurance that dawn comes after night and spring after winter.'*

*Rachel Carson - Silent Spring*



Logo's to go here.

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## THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE

*I will arise and go now, and go  
to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there,  
of clay and wattles made:  
Nine bean rows will I  
have there,  
a hive for the honey-bee,  
And live alone in the  
bee-loud glade.*

*And I shall have some  
peace there,  
for peace comes dropping slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the  
morning where the cricket sings;  
There midnight's all a glimmer,  
and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the  
linnets wings.*

*I will arise and go now, for  
always night and day,  
I hear the water lapping with  
low sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway,  
or on the pavements grey,  
I hear it in the deep  
heart's core.*

WB YATES