

## Stepping out to wellness:

– *Urban green spaces as community health resources*



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## Green space as a health resource

**People are saying that nature is**

- the foundation of health and wellbeing
- a versatile health resource that is underestimated, with therapeutic value yet to be realized
- a cost-effective, accessible, clinically valid mental health strategy that is free of adverse side-effects

**Research reveals that nature ...**

- supports physical, mental, spiritual, social and environmental wellness
- offers outdoor settings which enhance the effectiveness of physical activity
- provides specific benefits – e.g. reduced stress hormone cortisol, rapid recovery from stress, lower blood pressure, cognitive restoration, better cognitive performance



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## Case study – Fletcher Wildlife Garden (FWG), Ottawa

- what is the FWG?
  - urban green space maintained by volunteers
  - demonstration site for wildlife-friendly gardening
  - diverse “habitats”: Butterfly Meadow, Amphibian Pond, Backyard Garden, Woods
- research project focused on volunteer experiences and human-nature relations
- results reveal that volunteers working on-site experience broad and deep health benefits – physical, social, personal (mental, spiritual, intellectual, etc.)



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## Wellness at the FWG – volunteers speak

**Alternative exercise option**

- “I’m not fond of normal exercise options and this works up a sweat and feels purposeful” (Jo)
- “One can get all the exercise one needs pulling weeds and pruning trees. I come back feeling quite refreshed” (Gordon)



**Social wellness**

- **teamwork:** “Working with the people here, that’s very important to me” (Glenda)
- **friendship:** “I like being with the people there. It fills a social void” (Marie)
- **inspiration:** “I really like being with this group of people. I find them inspiring” (Evelyn)
- **like-minded fellowship:** “I really enjoy being surrounded by people that share similar passions and interests” (Cindy)

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## Personal/intangible wellness at the FWG – volunteers speak

**Sanctuary**

- “I like the peacefulness of the place. I’m comfortable here. I like being here” (Randy)
- FWG is somewhere to get “back to the soil when you get tired of asphalt” (Audrey)
- “To have a space that’s this close to home is like heaven. It’s really relaxing to come over here and sit. It’s such a break ... I can breathe” (Tracey)



**Enrichment**

- “There’s always something to see and learn. This place is full of constant surprises” (Tracey)
- “it [FWG] forms ... a non-threatening environment to achieve fulfillment” (Gordon)
- it is “nice to be able to contribute to something worthwhile” (Lisa)
- “I like feeling that I’m part of a group trying to heal some small part of the earth” (Marie)

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## Green space as a community health resource

- challenges and opportunities for health professionals
  - **integrate** nature (e.g. gardening, walking outdoors, nature volunteering) into health interventions
  - **collaborate** with local/regional partners (e.g. community gardens, nature reserves, neighbourhood parks) offering opportunities to volunteer outdoors
  - **participate** in protecting community green space
  - **value/prioritize** green space in health research, policy, planning

**Thank you!**  
If you have comments/questions, contact  
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