

Activity: Plant Care Goal: Cognitive Populations: Mental Health

TH Activity Plan – Pre-Employment Program Activities at Hospital Market Garden

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will undertake a variety of gardening tasks as part of a pre-employability program within a psychiatric hospital setting & an on-site market garden.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Learn & practice employment skills-managing time, interacting with others, taking directions; acquire horticulture knowledge

Physical: Build stamina & strength; garden in all weather conditions

Psychological/Emotional: Build confidence in employment skills; develop appropriate attitudes & ethics for workplace settings

Sensory: Handle a variety of plants with sensory qualities without discomfort or distress

Social: Develop stronger interpersonal skills; learn to manage conflict in workplace, simulated workplace & other; practice appropriate work attire & hygiene

Materials

Plants, seeds

Garden tools

Market stand

Gloves, wipes

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials. Identify what garden tasks need attention.
2. Facilitator begins session by coordinating participants, assigning garden tasks based on needs of the garden & participant needs & skills.
3. Each session will vary depending on time of year, time of day & what tasks need to be undertaken in the market garden setting (the areas of the garden where production of vegetables are grown for sale & donation) & in the market garden stand. Tasks can include planting, weeding, watering, harvesting & composting.
4. Some participants may work in the market garden stand doing sales, handling cash, bagging, washing & managing produce.
5. The sessions are specified time slots, typically 2 hours twice a week.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This format using TH gardening activities was developed by the Coordinator of the market garden and Occupational Therapists at the hospital that treats patients with mental health and addiction issues. The program is designed for patients who are ready to start transitioning into the community but are still patients at the hospital and not ready for full time work. Structured as a work program (with a paid honorarium), participants undertake a variety of garden tasks at the hospital's on-site garden. Vegetables are the primary crop, grown for sale at the garden market stand, for donation to community groups, and for nutrition and cooking programming within the hospital. The Garden Coordinator is present for activities, which will also often include other garden staff and volunteers. Specific diagnoses of participants are not shared with

facilitator or volunteers, with the primary focus on supporting personal growth and employment skill development through hands-on horticulture work.

Therapeutic goals were developed by Occupational Therapists in the Psychosocial Rehabilitation unit and are integrated into the program and its activities with this specific focus of developing and practicing employment skills in the market garden setting. They span multiple health domains. Social skills include interacting with others (staff, participants, customers), improving communication skills, wearing appropriate workplace clothing (and hygiene), following directions, and managing conflict. Physical goals include increasing strength and stamina to be able to grow, handle, transport plants and garden equipment. Intellectual goals with the vocational focus include acquiring plant knowledge and experience, understanding and practicing appropriate workplace habits, attitudes and behaviors.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.

WebMD identifies vegetables/fruits that can be toxic including apple seeds and stone-fruit pits, elderberries, nutmeg, sprouted green potatoes, raw kidney beans, rhubarb leaves, cassava, raw lima beans and butterbeans, asparagus berries, tomato leaves, roots and stems, and some mushrooms, with quantity a factor for some as is raw vs cooked consumption (Reiff Ellis, 2023). Other vegetables identified by the Environmental Working Group as the *dirty dozen*, have pesticides that can be harmful so awareness of and source of these is important – kale, spinach, collard greens, mustard greens, peppers, green beans. Other vegetables to be aware of that may have some health risk - eggplant (high amounts of solanine), raw bean sprouts, lettuce which has had numerous e coli outbreaks when commercially grown.

Assessment of participants should be done prior to sessions, determining safety issues. Closer supervision may be required where participants may self-harm or harm others with garden equipment or tools. Elopement is a possibility so protocols should be in place if this is a concern. Activities take place in all weather conditions including rain (not lightning).

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Market gardens, usually with large production beds, are able to grow amounts of vegetables (or flowers) that can be sold or used within the facility setting. When participants are residing at the hospital they do not require this type of produce for personal consumption, however, when transiting into the community, their experience growing edibles may address some food insecurity. Vegetables that are grown in this program include pes, beans, zucchini, carrots, beets and lettuce.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

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- Newman, B.M. & Newman, P.R. (2020). Psychosocial theory. *Theories of Adolescent Development*. Academic Press. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/psychosocial-theory>
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Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2023.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2023.