

## PROGRAM EVALUATION: HORTICULTURAL THERAPY PROGRAM



### ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The horticultural therapy program (HTP) is a group-based therapeutic modality led by Sally Haskett, HTR. The program runs four 10-week sessions throughout each year. The sessions mirror the seasons (i.e., summer, fall, winter, spring) and take place at The Farm at Penny Lane. Each weekly session lasts two hours and includes: garden-related education, gardening work, and group therapy time for sharing and reflection.

The goal of the horticultural therapy program is to promote overall health and wellness (including physical, social, and emotional health) through horticultural learning and gardening in an inclusive setting for individuals with severe and persistent mental illnesses.

### EVALUATION DESIGN

The Community Outcomes Research and Evaluation Center (COREC) partnered with Ms. Haskett and Dena Lind, a student volunteer, to implement a program evaluation to examine a number of outcomes. There are both qualitative and quantitative components of evaluation, which was designed to address the following questions: 1) Are there improvements in participants' physical health and health habits? 2) Are there improvements in participants' mental health symptoms and functioning? 3) Are there improvements in participants' self-efficacy? 4) Are there improvements in participants' social connectedness? and 5) Are participants satisfied with the program?

### METHOD

*Single-group Pre-Post Design:* We collected self-report data from participants using 8 widely-used standardized measures, plus demographic information and qualitative data about each participant's personal goals. The survey measures were collected prior to the first session and at the last weekly session.

*Journal Entries:* At the end of each weekly session participants were offered an opportunity to journal about their experiences on The Farm that day and how The Farm activities impacted their lives.

*Program Debrief:* At the final session of the program, participants were provided the opportunity to discuss their program experiences. In particular, participants were invited to discuss the ways the HTP had been helpful to them in their lives outside of the group, and changes to the program or The Farm they would like to see. Data collection occurred in the fall and winter of 2016.



### RESULTS/CONCLUSIONS/NEXT STEPS

Despite a limited sample size ( $n=14$ ), fall and winter session pre-test and post-test comparisons showed that participants had improved quality of life, mental health symptoms, and social connectedness ( $p < .05$ ). Although not statistically significant, participants also showed improvement in self-efficacy, self-esteem, and health behaviors. We are finalizing the analysis of the fall session qualitative data.

These preliminary results are promising. Ongoing program evaluation of HTP, with additional participants, will continue.

Stacy E Burgin, MA, COREC, Sally Haskert, HTR, Dena Lind, MSW and Gary Cuddeback, Ph.D., COREC, contributed to this report. This evaluation was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB# 16-528) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



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