



University of  
**Salford**  
MANCHESTER

**Service Evaluation of the Growing Well  
Therapeutic Community  
October 2016**

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**Growing Well Therapeutic Community Evaluation**  
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**Changes in the community**

Since the evaluation in 2015, the community has changed membership,, although remains comprised of people with a range of diagnoses. The TC has implemented an individualised 'induction plan' for all new members, which appears to have made a difference to how quickly new members are able to attach to and engage with the group.

**Evaluation process**

The researcher attended the TC for a day, conducting a group interview in the morning activity session and left just prior to the final group meeting to allow group members time to process and reflect on their experiences of the group interview privately without the researcher being present. TC members were advised that participation was not compulsory, and that no identifying details would be recorded. The TC members were also advised that they could have a member of TC staff present during the group interview for the purposes of support, if they wished. The TC members discussed this during their morning therapy group (which the researcher did not attend), and chose to have a member of staff present during the interview. Prior to the interview, the researcher outlined the questions (see below) with TC members for them to reflect upon before responding. The researcher transcribed the TC members responses during the interview.

A number of former members of the community had been contacted by the Therapeutic Coordinator and asked if they would be happy for their contact details to be passed on to the researcher. Former members of the community who had given their consent to be contacted were approached by email and invited to have a brief telephone interview with the researcher. Two former members responded.

A member checking procedure has been used, and the responses identified in this report have been verified by TC members as a true and accurate record of their responses, and that the interpretations of their responses accurately capture the essence of what they were saying.

All identifying details of members have been removed. To ensure that anonymity is preserved, no distinction will be made between current and former TC members, and throughout this report both current and former members will be referred to as 'TC members'.

Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun, Clarke and Rance, 2015). The themes are discussed below, with selected quotes presented to support and illustrate the themes.

Additional feedback has been sought from key staff from the Community Mental Health Trust (CMHT). Two responses were provided, which have been included in this report. This is important feedback as a source of triangulation of data and one which includes an external perspective on the TC from staff who refer their clients to Growing Well.

**Questions for TC members:**

*What is it like coming here to Growing well? What has been your experience of attending the project?*

*How have you benefitted from attending? What has changed for you since coming here?*

*What do you think has brought about these changes?*

*Can you say something about the different activities and how each of them helps?*

*Is there anything that hasn't changed for you that you wish had changed?*

*If you compare GW to other services you have received in the past, in what ways is it different and in what ways is it the same?*

*Is there anything about the project that you would like to be different? Do you have any recommendations?*

## **Results**

The data collection process was concerned with exploring two distinct lines of enquiry; firstly, whether or not members felt that they had changed as a result of their participation in the TC, and if so, what the nature of these changes was. The second line of enquiry was related to what aspects of the TC were experienced as most helpful and which were experienced as unhelpful.

## **Changes**

All TC members reported experiencing therapeutic benefits from attending. Although there was some variability about the degree of changes experienced amongst members, there was unanimous agreement that participating in the TC had been beneficial. The subjective report of members suggested that the benefits were broader than those which might be captured using outcome measures, and were ones which were associated with improvements in quality of life. Furthermore, improvements also appeared to have had an overall positive impact on TC members use of mental health services and need for medication.

*'I feel like I'm getting better and this is definitely helping. This is my only therapy. I have my nurse once a week, but otherwise this is the only therapeutic input I receive.'*

*'I've got better since being here- I've been ill for (a long time) and I can actually say I'm coming out of it. I was getting worse in the mental health system. Since coming here, I'm off medication and don't have much contact with the mental health team.'*

The changes reported by TC members related to three domains, with each domain having themes contained within it. The three domains of change were; *Interpersonal changes, improvements in managing difficult feelings, and empowerment.*

## **Domain One: Interpersonal changes**

Problems with interpersonal functioning is a characteristic feature of personality disorders and a number of other mental health problems. TC members reported significant changes in how they relate to others, and specifically, changes in their behaviour which have had a positive impact on how other people experience them, which in turn has improved their relationships. The specific positive interpersonal changes identified, included; enhanced capacity to consider one's impact on others, enhanced trust, opening up to others, overcoming feelings of isolation and social anxiety, and managing conflict.

### ***Enhanced capacity to consider one's impact on others***

It appears that a reduction in impulsivity and an increased capacity to think about one's impact on others have been particularly important in bringing about these changes.

*'We're starting to try and rein in what we say a little bit- thinking about what you're going to say and the impact that might have on someone else so that it doesn't trigger them. I'm much more self-aware around other people, I've now got a 'stop button', which for me is a really big change.'*

*'I've been given a lot of input from the psychotherapists about my impact on others, so I've learnt a lot about how I can trigger others.'*

These changes are particularly significant for TC members with a diagnosis of BPD, as commonly people with BPD experience problems with being able to sufficiently assess how their behaviour and relational style impacts on others, and also often experience problems with being able to adaptively adjust their behaviour to encourage the positive responses they seek from others.

### **Enhanced trust**

The members of the TC who spoke to the researcher all reported experiencing profound problems with interpersonal relationships. For a range of reasons (often associated with past traumatic experiences), many struggle with issues of trust, and participation in the TC has helped members to regain their ability to trust and develop and maintain relationships. This was movingly expressed by one member who said:

*'It has resurrected a feeling of faith that I can still have friendships and relationships and that I'm not going to ruin everything. People do care about me, and people can receive the interest and care that I have for others. It gives me courage. Sometimes I feel frightened being with people, but just by being here we build relationships which is amazing. When we laugh together- its been such a long time since I was able to do that.'*

The development of trust cannot be understated in its significance for the members of the TC. As discussed above, many have experienced multiple relational trauma and traumatic experiences which have shattered their sense of trust in others and the world. This fundamental lack of trust has substantially influenced their relationships with others and their sense of safety in the world, and has likely been a contributing factor in their problems. As such, the improvements in trust are indicative of a move towards recovery.

### **Opening up to others**

Several members reported that gradually opening up to others has been an important part of their experience of the TC.

*'Sometimes it's been nerve-wracking. I struggled with it for a long time and sometimes even now. I find it easier now the group is smaller... I still do struggle with talking in the group about myself. It seems so self-indulgent, but I realise that's what you're supposed to do.'*

In this comment, the tension between the desire for interpersonal contact and poor self-esteem is evident. The group size appears to make it easier for members to feel able to open up. It is likely that some kind of 'contagion effect' operates here, in that openness from members encourages other members to be more open in response. This increased openness not only has a beneficial effect on interpersonal relationships, but also facilitates the psychotherapeutic process, which relies on emotional openness.

### **Overcoming feelings of isolation and social anxiety.**

TC members typically reported experiencing isolation and social anxiety in their day-to-day lives, and having a tendency to withdraw. Spending a full day each week with other people seems to have been particularly useful in helping members overcome their feelings of isolation, and also in helping them address their social anxiety which lessens their tendencies to withdraw.

*'Sometimes it has felt like really essential contact with other people, it's been about reconnecting with the world.'*

The task-focused approach of using horticulture as a therapeutic activity seems to have been particularly important for members of the group as a medium for enabling them to engage in activity with others.

*'The helpful part was integrating with other people. I'm generally very shy. There, everyone was in the same boat, so it was easy to get on with everyone, and because of the gardening there was always a goal and some activity to be involved in. There was a goal each day to work towards.'*

TC members reported that the horticulture activities were soothing, and could be done whilst chatting to someone, or in silence which allowed them to manage their own level of interpersonal contact. The sense of connection experienced by TC members was also enhanced by the TC's other activities, including the focus on taking group tea breaks and having lunch together as a group (see below).

### **Managing conflict**

Learning how to manage conflict and difficulties between people has been an important aspect of the TC experience for many members. Although several members reported being afraid of conflict, and had a desire to run away when conflict occurred, they felt that they were learning how to approach conflict constructively. Members generally felt that the day to day process of the TC provided ample 'live' opportunities to practice conflict resolution skills.

*'How conversations and discussions go and how we handle disagreements and hiccups that are part of every day life has been really helpful. Being here gives us an opportunity to work out what's happened, get feedback.'*

Modelling from TC staff about how to disagree and manage differences of opinion has been an important learning experience for several members:

*'Seeing the staff interact and even disagree but keep each other ok helps.'*

*'I quite like that the staff get it wrong sometimes and say sorry. That does so much for trust. It shows that they are not super-special and that we are a community. We all make mistakes and we are ok with doing it.'*

The TC members were aware that they have had problems with relationships and managing conflict in the past. Generally, members felt that participation in the TC was a learning experience, and one which all members and staff were engaged in simultaneously.

*'The things that help are the interactions with the group, because if you can get on with the people here you can get on with anyone. Sometimes the control of the group is a bit lacking. For instance once there was a conflict where I didn't feel that the group was directed by the therapists. It was a learning curve though, so we've all developed, and the therapists have done things different since then. You have to have the negatives to have the positives.'*

### **Domain Two: Managing difficult feelings**

The format of the TC has provided members with a range of different opportunities for helping them to manage difficult feelings. Some TC members found it beneficial to find out about different coping strategies from other members of the community.

*'Learning about how other people handle things has been helpful.'*

Given that a central aspect of many mental health problems are difficulties with regulating emotions, learning how to manage one's feelings is likely to promote recovery amongst TC members. This has extended to an increased capacity to self-soothe; an important aspect of the recovery process for someone with mental health problems.

*'I've learned to self-soothe by myself- I don't need a psychotherapist to talk me through that any more.'*

Participation in the therapy groups and TC activities have been difficult for members at different times, however, staying with these difficulties and finding new ways to cope with them has been beneficial:

*'Some weeks have been pretty intense, particularly in the first few months of coming along. I have a lot going on in my head, and sometimes its been hard to stay in the group.'*

Furthermore, the experiences of emotional intensity have been challenging, especially when these have involved vulnerability. Over time, TC members have each found new ways to manage difficult feelings:

*'Its been very emotional and exhausting. By virtue of being here you're being vulnerable. I've sometimes wanted to hide it. It takes a long time to get comfortable with being vulnerable.'*

The range of activities offered at Growing Well provide multiple opportunities for TC members to find new ways to manage difficult and intense emotions. Each activity, including group therapy, horticulture, administration tasks, community lunch preparation and social interaction enables members to discover, apply and integrate affect regulation in a holistic manner, and provides them with strategies that can be readily applied and adapted to suit the different situations they are in in their day-to-day lives.

### **Domain Three: Empowerment**

Empowerment was a major theme which ran throughout many of the TC members responses. This is encouraging, given that empowerment is a central principle of the recovery movement. Many TC members reported that they experienced the staff as highly responsive. This is in contrast to the experiences which some TC members have had in mental health services in the past.

*'It's empowering realising that we are listened to and responded to.'*

The democratic nature of the TC and the active engagement of all members in decision-making processes has been both difficult to adjust to, but ultimately empowering for group members. This challenge was expressed by one member:

*'One thing I did struggle with at first was taking a bit more active a role into the decision making process. I found that hard and didn't want to. I wanted to be directed and guided and told what to do.'*

Many members reported that they had experienced problems around making decisions in their life, and it seems likely that this active engagement and empowering ethos at the TC directly challenges this and promotes change. The fact that decisions are shared appears to be relevant to this, in that taking such a proactive stance towards problem-solving and decision making has enabled them to develop greater confidence in applying these approaches in their lives. Furthermore, the Growing Well staff team actively elicit members views, which encourages those who might be more inclined to take a passive stance to participate in the decision making process.

Exploring the implications of their diagnosis, and finding ways to explain their diagnosis to others has been empowering. In particular, designing a leaflet was particularly significant to TC members. This was expressed by one member who said:

*'We're all finding it easier to speak about our diagnosis, and also are gaining confidence about how to explain it. When we made the leaflet it helped to explain what the diagnosis means and it helped me to feel like an expert on my own diagnosis.'*

### **Making sense of and reframing diagnosis**

Making sense of, and understanding their diagnosis has been an important aspect of the TC experience for members, and is one which has contributed to the overall sense of empowerment experienced by many TC members.

*'There is something about the diagnosis in the first place,- some confusion about what it means. The diagnosis doesn't show how it manifests individually, so its misleading.'*

*'You already feel confused with the world, and then this diagnosis gets added in which makes it more confusing.'*

*'There's a comfort knowing that all of us have had to fit criteria and be diagnosed.'*

The TC members participated in an activity where they designed a leaflet about their diagnosis which they experienced as engaging and empowering. Members felt that they had been 'given a voice' and found ways to express the subjective, lived experience of their diagnosis which has clearly been beneficial to their self-esteem and confidence.

In addition to coming to terms with the impact of their diagnosis on their lives, TC members have started to contextualise their diagnosis as just one aspect of their experience, and as something which does not have to define their entire existence.

*'I am more inclined to use the word of my diagnosis than I ever would before. I would never talk about it previously. That makes it 'easier to carry'.'*

*'The focus here is on being humans and not on the diagnosis but on how we can make our lives work and function for us.'*

### **Helpful aspects of the TC**

TC members were invited to comment on the aspects of the TC which they found to be particularly helpful. Responses were grouped into two domains: *Atmosphere and Ethos*, and *Activities and Structure*.

#### **Atmosphere and Ethos**

##### ***A unique experience***

Almost all TC members stated that they felt that the TC was a unique therapeutic experience, which is very different to other services they have accessed in the past. The countryside location and the yurts were acknowledged as providing an environment which encouraged a sense of connection to nature, and by extension, members of the community.

*'It was incredibly useful. The services I have used over the years have helped me in different ways in the past- all depending on what I was going through at the time. Each service has given me something different, but this one was one of the most useful I've accessed.'*

##### ***Proactive and democratic therapist stance***

Some of the longer-standing members noted that there had been a positive change in how the therapists were approaching and managing issues.

*'The therapists are good at bringing people back who have drifted away from the TC for a few weeks- they get in touch with them and are proactive to bring people back. We get a lot more texts and information and we are all much more involved in the process. It feels much more equal and democratic now.'*

It is clear that Growing Well operates in accordance with the humanistic philosophy and active therapist stance which are characteristic of Transactional Analysis.

##### ***Stability and continuity***

TC members reported that having a regular routine of attending and a clear structure to the day at the community was helpful. In particular, this encouraged them to get out of the house and connect with other people on days when they would be more inclined towards withdrawal.

*'(Attending was) tricky at the start, but regularity, stability and routine made it easier. There's comfort in the familiarity of the structure of each day.'*

*'The discipline of the routine is very important to me. This is my going out.'*

*'Coming here makes you enter life rather than putting life on hold. In individual therapy you are just there for an hour- here its a full day, its part of my week'*

It is clear that members felt a sense of commitment to Growing Well, and recognised its value and unique environment. Several members found the routine of attending and the clear structure of the day at the TC gave them a sense of predictability which helped them to feel safe.

### **Shared Experience**

An increased sense of connection and a reduction in feelings of isolation was a common response from TC members.

*'Talking to people with shared experiences was useful, in terms of experiencing empathy from other people and that stopped me from feeling totally alone. I have also gained a lot from finding out how other people had dealt with things in the past. Also hearing others life views was helpful, particularly for people with PD as this gave a different way to view things. Knowledge sharing was really useful.'*

The sense of shared experience was an interesting finding, in light of the fact that most TC members have considerable experience of mental health services, and have had previous contact with other mental health service users. It would seem that the TC has promoted a greater sense of connectedness and a willingness to be open amongst members.

### **Openness and acceptance**

The Growing Well TC has created a group climate of openness and acceptance, which TC members not only value, but experience as contributing significantly to their recovery.

*'I seemed almost 'at home' and comfortable from the start'*

Judicious use of self-disclosure by the staff has been a source of hope and for TC members *'Its been helpful to know that members of staff have had their own struggles in life.'*

*'You can come here and just be who you actually are. You can say stuff you wouldn't even tell your partner. We have bonded really well and are much more honest about our feelings.'*

This atmosphere of openness and acceptance was movingly described by one TC member: *'When I go home I take with me a lovely feeling of belonging and connection. It gives a sense of being alive.'*

### **Activities and Structure**

TC members were asked to comment on what they felt were the most useful aspects of the TC. Although the therapy groups were unanimously considered helpful, members felt that the range of different activities conducted at the TC were all useful, and that the combination of activities and setting provided a comprehensive and unique therapeutic experience.

### **Horticulture**

TC members recognised the therapeutic value of the horticulture activities. The benefits of horticulture were recognised as wide, and promoted healthy eating and encouraged members to holistically focus on their well-being.

*'Not being in a sterile room definitely helps. Eating what you grow for lunch is amazing. I eat really well on a Friday.'*

### **Group therapy**

The group therapy model adopted by the TC has been particularly important for all members, who have found that participation in the group has been therapeutic for them, even on days when they did not actively 'do a piece of work' in the group.

*'Learning from others has been really valuable. Not 'having to talk' but still being able to work on my stuff because other people are talking so I learn from that and get something from that. It works far better for me than individual therapy.'*

*'The group therapy sessions were most useful to me- more so than the horticulture aspects. That said, I did find the horticulture to be beneficial, but it was the group therapy which was most helpful'*

### **Administrative activities**

One member expressed how they valued participating in the TC by engaging in administrative tasks as it enabled them to meaningfully draw on skills learned in their previous career which in turn fosters a greater sense of self-agency and self-efficacy.

*'I want an opportunity to do all of those things, so that helps me to contribute. It gives me an opportunity to prove I am capable.'*

### **Lunchtime**

Although having lunch together is not strictly speaking an activity, members recognised the lunch as being an intrinsic and central part of the TC day, and one which had been valuable to them. The therapeutic value of the shared lunchtime ritual was identified by several members, and may have contributed to a sense of 'normality' and bonding between members. Although not related to the interview data, and therefore based only on subjective observation, the researcher noted that the conversations during lunch were very relaxed and comfortable and that there was a great deal of warmth and care amongst members and staff.

*'It doesn't feel like therapy- it feels like 'our group'; its more day to day life. What's happened in our week and what problems are going on. The therapists interact easily.'*

### **Opportunities for one-to-one meetings**

Several TC members expressed that they had valued the opportunities for One-to-one meetings with members of staff.

*'The therapists are very good at picking up that there's something wrong if you're not talking or participating. They invite you into a one-to-one if you don't want to talk in the group. They encourage you to talk.'*

*'There was a lady there who talked to everyone on an individual basis about their problems. She was a good sounding board. I find it hard to talk to my partner about my problems but she was great.'*

### **Psychoeducational aspects**

The language of Transactional Analysis was readily used by TC members in their conversations both with each other, with staff and with the researcher, suggesting that not only have they found this theoretical approach useful in making sense of their experiences, but that they can use this shared language to communicate. The usefulness of the psychoeducational sessions was repeatedly emphasised in the interviews with TC members.

*'A big thing for me has been the learning based material which has been really useful. Such as learning about anxiety, and learning about transactional analysis.'*

*'The theory and learning gives self-awareness, understanding, and hope.'*

The combination of group therapy, activities and psychoeducational sessions, and the ordering of these was appreciated by TC members.

*'There's the therapy where we address things then we go on to learn things which allows us to make sense of it.'*

The use of a TA-based psychoeducational approach provides an opportunity to integrate the experiences of the TC, and provides a further therapeutic activity which in itself is valuable in promoting recovery. Members generally felt that the psychoeducational aspects were empowering in that they provided them with a means to understand their internal and interpersonal experiences and gave them a means to play an active role in their own recovery. Furthermore, the use of the shared language of Transactional Analysis was experienced as democratic and provided TC members with a means to engage with staff on an equal footing.

### **Unhelpful aspects of the TC**

TC members found it difficult to identify unhelpful aspects of the TC, with several reporting that whenever they had experienced something as unhelpful that they had been able to raise this in the community, and that the TC staff and members had addressed the issue immediately. As such, they felt that there were no generally unhelpful aspects of the TC, although one member did express a sense of frustration that on occasions they had experienced group therapy sessions as being 'a bit laboured'.

### **Difficulties/ struggles with the TC**

Overall, experiences of the TC were positive. Although some difficult experiences were identified, these were recognised as being transitory, or related to specific incidents. In such cases, TC members were reflective about their own reactions to the situations, and also appreciated the responsiveness of the staff team and their willingness to learn and engage with the process. No one reported any adverse or negative effects from participating in the TC.

Understandably, some TC members expressed that attending during bad weather was sometimes difficult, however other members found that the polytunnels and yurts provided a cosy environment which meant that poor weather conditions did not bother them so much.

### **Outcome Measure Data**

From 2014 to May 2016, Growing Well used CORE-10, as the primary outcome measure. Although this is a widely used tool, there have been a number of problems with the implementation of this. In particular, members of the TC reported that this measure did not adequately or accurately capture their distress or their changes.

There is insufficient data to conduct a statistical test of with the outcome measures, however, simple descriptive statistics can be drawn from the data. Analysis of data from these measures shows that half of the TC members have shown an improvement in social confidence and over half have experienced improvements in their levels of experienced personal social support. A third of TC members indicated improvements in their overall sense of resilience. Just under half of the TC members reported an improvement in their mood and a reduction in suicidal thinking, and a third of members reported improvements in anxiety levels.

These figures show a consistent picture of improvements in key areas of distress which are particularly problematic for the client group who form the membership of the TC, and demonstrate

a trend towards recovery and improvement mental health. In light of the difficulties reported by TC members with the outcome measures, and if the qualitative reports are taken into account, it would seem likely that the actual level of experienced change amongst TC members is indeed greater than the outcome measures would suggest.

### Cost-effectiveness of service

Staff at Growing Well have used the Client Service Receipt Inventory (CSRI) to provide an indication of cost-effectiveness of the service. The CSRI is a measure which gathers information on service use. The tool includes calculation of cost of health services (including medication, admissions, community services and specialist care), social care, accommodation, and includes valuation of unpaid support from carers. In particular, it provides a measure of resource usage per service user and can provide a valuable indication as to the cost-effectiveness of services and interventions. At Growing Well, data has been recorded for 12 service users using the CSRI during the time of their membership of the TC. Due to the small sample size, it is not possible to conduct a statistical analysis of service use, however, it is possible to present overall changes in service use cost per service user (see table below) and collectively during the course of engagement with the project. Typically, TC members report substantially reduced use of services during their engagement with the project. Out of 12 service users, 7 had reduced service costs, 3 had increased service costs, and two remained unchanged with zero reported service costs.

Service User	Initial costs	Costs at end of service	Total change
1	£540	£765	+£225
2	£0	£0	£0
3	£715	£0	-£715
4	£71,200	£320	-£70,880
5	£11,975	£40,030	+£28,055
6	£2,148	£358	-£1,790
7	£4,280	£5,090	+£810
8	£1,650	£668	-£982
9	£1,630	£356	-£1,274
10	£165	£330	+£165
11	£22,670	£6,150	-£16,520
12	£0	£0	£0
<b>Overall Service</b>	<b>£116,973</b>	<b>£54,067</b>	<b>-£62,905</b>

As can be seen, the table shows that service costs by TC members were reduced by £62,905 during the period of their engagement in the project. Whilst it is possible that this reduction may to some extent be due to other variables, the TC members report reductions in engagement with other services, and attribute this reduction in service use directly to their membership of Growing Well.

### Responses from CMHT Staff

Two CMHT staff members responded to the call for feedback for inclusion in this report. The feedback has been redacted to ensure that the comments do not reveal any potentially identifying features of a specific TC member. The feedback from these two staff members is invaluable in

providing data from sources external to the TC, and provides an opportunity to triangulate the findings presented above with the observations of mental health professionals involved in the care of the TC members.

The first CMHT staff member reported that their clients who have attended the TC have become more confident. They experienced the Growing Well staff as *'experienced staff who have a very supportive and positive attitude to clients.'* No areas for service improvement were identified.

The second CMHT staff member provided detailed feedback, which clearly supports the findings reported above. They reported that *'My client appears to be more contained and better able to manage everyday stressors. [They are] able to reflect more on [their thoughts/behaviours and actions and be mindful of others around [them]. [My client] reports that [their] relationships with others have improved and [they are] better at managing [their] emotional responses towards others. [My client] is becoming more skilled at mentalizing and states that [they] feels valued within the group which has improved [their] confidence.'*

This CMHT staff member commented on the *'caring nature of the staff and how they support each other and really believe in the service that they provide.... [and] The inclusiveness of the service... The TC has a lovely community spirit and a culture of care and personal growth.'*

They also commented on the TC environment: *'The venue as a whole has a very therapeutic feel and lends itself to the humanness of the therapy provided.'*

This member of CMHT staff felt that it was very important that the service provided by Growing Well be available. They commented that they *'have seen how valuable this type of treatment is and how it can change lives. I currently work in the NHS where long term therapy/treatments are very rare. Individuals with a diagnosis of Personality Disorder need and benefit from long term relational therapy and need this type of service.'*

This CMHT staff member also commented on the concerns that the TC have experienced with regards continued funding, and wondered about the impact this sense of uncertainty and anxiety might have on the staff team and TC members.

It is clear that the experiences of CMHT staff members who have clients who have engaged with Growing Well value the project. Furthermore, the comments provided verify many of the findings presented above, thus enhancing the reliability of the findings of this report.

## **Discussion**

It is evident that Growing Well continues to provide an effective and unique therapeutic environment which specialises in working with clients who have complex problems. The changes in interpersonal functioning, emotional regulation and empowerment go right to the heart of the mental health issues of the client group the TC serves.

It is clear that the TC is run by a highly committed and highly skilled staff team. Although the therapists in particular were named by TC members as providing valuable input, there was acknowledgement that the input from the Horticultural Specialist, Volunteer co-ordinator, and Recovery Specialist was also important. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect and a clear interest in promoting the wellbeing of all people- TC members and staff- amongst everyone who is part of the TC.

## **Areas for development**

### ***Additional time***

The request for additional time (e.g. longer TC days or additional TC days) recurred in this evaluation, however, the group was mixed in terms of their desires in this respect with some members feeling that one day a week was about right for them, some members wanting additional days and some wanting just one day, but one which is longer. In light of this, it is not possible to

state that the uptake of additional days would be sufficient to warrant this. Furthermore, the cost implications of additional days mean that extending the service (with current levels of funding) is impractical.

### ***Additional psychoeducational resources***

As TC members reported the value of the psychoeducational aspects of Growing Well, one option for service development which would not require extensive resources would be considering greater use of psychoeducational/ therapeutic materials between TC meetings. Clearly, not every TC member would wish to use such materials, however, having additional materials available could provide members with an additional 'bridge' between their experience of the TC and their every day lives.

### ***Co-ordination with other services***

Several TC members expressed some frustration that the TC seemed to be separate to their NHS service provision. The comments of the member quoted below are typical of those expressing such frustration:

*'(I would prefer)...if it was more integrated into the other care I'm receiving from the NHS. It would be better and to see how this can work in conjunction with any other therapy I'm receiving. It would be helpful if workers would speak to each other.'*

It would be helpful for TC staff and key staff from the CMHT to meet to discuss ways of forging links, and appropriately sharing information between services.

### ***Assessing outcomes***

Whilst standard outcome measures typically used in therapy services (such as CORE-OM) are unlikely to be sufficiently sensitive to accurately capture change amongst the client group attending Growing Well, or would only provide a superficial picture of change, there is still scope for investigating and initiating a measurable outcome. One option would be to develop the use of an individualised outcome measure based on client-identified problems and goals, such as the Personal Questionnaire. Growing Well have recently introduced Mental Health Recovery STAR as an alternative means of assessing outcomes which is more suited to their client group. It seems likely that the use of the Mental Health Recovery STAR will more accurately capture the experiences and outcomes of TC members. Future evaluation which examines this data is clearly warranted.

### ***Future consideration***

It is the researcher's view that the importance of the collective lunchtime cannot be understated, and would be worth exploring in further evaluation.

