



SOCIAL CIRCLES

Growing Wellness

Social Impact Report

as at
1st March 2024



Introduction

Social Circles CIC reclaims gardens for those unable to do so due to age, ability or circumstances that they may enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits of being outdoors with nature in the safety and security of their own homes.

We launched in April 2022 with a pilot in Bridgwater, starting with a post on Facebook to see if there was a demand. Initially working just one day per week self-referrals quickly grew and we started to also receive referrals from other local community groups, statutory organisations and housing officers. We are now on-site in peoples' gardens 3 or 4 days per week covering Bridgwater, Highbridge, Burnham, Street, Glastonbury and Wells, and we are booked for around three weeks in advance and have a waiting list of enquiries and referrals.



Whilst we now receive regular referrals, we recognise we are a Gateway Service giving access to other support as needed by each individual, including referral or signposting on issues such as benefits, debt, energy, food and mobility aids, but also on support for mental health - many people will ask for help with garden but not for support in other areas of their life. We build relationships with the people we work with which allows us to give them the confidence to seek the help they need.



Most of the people we work with have been impacted by the Cost of Living crisis, locked into poverty through fixed incomes or means tested benefits. This means they are unable to afford the upfront expense of reclaiming their garden but are able to either maintain their outdoor space themselves going forward, or can afford to bring in a regular gardener to maintain the garden once it has been reclaimed.

We are a listening organisation and have revised our business model to meet our beneficiaries needs, so where we know people will struggle to maintain their gardens we work with them over a longer timescale to find a solution and prevent the garden becoming overgrown again. This may be around building confidence to maintain their garden, ensuring they have

the right tools or continuing to help with larger jobs such as cutting hedges and pruning trees. However, we do not want to disrupt the commercial market so only continue to work with people where they are particularly vulnerable or their financial situation prevents them from paying for those larger jobs.

We are currently exploring how we encourage people to have a deeper engagement with nature through growing food, which might be passive planting such as fruit trees and bushes, and/or creating an environment where they can grow annuals such as salads and vegetables which has involved using elevated planting beds for those less physically able.



We have also been in conversation with a local 'Good Neighbour Scheme' to understand how we can extend our model to collaborate with community volunteers to help people maintain gardens whilst also ensuring the full social impact of re-engaging with neighbours and building more resilient communities is embedded in the work we do.



This year we have diverted slightly from our mission working initially with Diversity Voice to create a community garden at Victoria Park in Bridgwater for displaced persons, and are now collaborating with North Petherton Town Council, Charis Refugees and Taunton Welcomes Refugees to create a community gardening space in North Petherton targeting asylum seekers accommodated locally.

Our objectives are to:

- Improve mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Create a sense of 'taking control' and increased 'purpose'
- Provide opportunity for physical exercise and ageing well
- Reduce loneliness and isolation
- Improve the sense of 'belonging' and inclusion in the wider community

Over the next 12 months we will be exploring how we capture data to evidence meeting those objectives, further revise the business model as required in consultation with our customers, service users and those we collaborate with, and reporting on our success and future plans.

Since launching in April 2022 we have:

Worked with

152

Somerset households

Directly benefitting

185

resident adults and

58

dependent children

"You have given me space to breath"

"I'm in therapy for depression and burnout at the moment and I need small victories"

"Thank you. You have given me the will to live"

"The day after you cleared the garden, my daughter walked down to the bottom at sunrise and started mimicking the bird calls. She came back with a story of what was happening with the birds. She didn't say it, but I can tell that she loves it"

74

adults are elders and

29

are lone parents

76

adults live in Social
Housing
of which 32 are Homes
in Sedgemoor
residents, and 26 are
Aster customers

"The team at Social Circles got into the hearts of our residents. They cleared a very overgrown garden which had an immediate positive impact on the resident, but also spurred neighbours to smarten up their gardens! Their work truly showcased how social impact can be felt in our communities"

"Due to Social Circles help mum and children could easily access the outside area without any safety concerns, they were able to spend more time outdoors which significantly helps the entire family's mental health, and were able to bond by playing together which is something they had not experienced together before and has benefitted all of the family."

Approximately
21,470m²
of garden ground has
been reclaimed or
5.3 acres

It is estimated health and wellbeing gains equate
to

£65,860

of savings for Somerset NHS and Social Care
services
(ONS Nov 2023)

"My husband died suddenly 3 years ago. He was only young and left me with three kids to bring up. I still have all his stuff in the house, I haven't been able to clear anything. He used to look after the garden and I have tried, but it's just too much."

"I just need somewhere where I can sit and relax and think about things. I'm so exhausted."

For every

£1.00

invested through Open Mental Health, there is an estimated return of

£3.47

in savings to Somerset NHS and Social Care (July 2023 to Feb 2024)

Organisational referrals have come from:

Somerset Council	20
Village Agents	21
NHS Mental Health	5
Aster Housing	18

* Somerset Council includes Social Services, Family Intervention Service, Health Visitors, Independence Plus and Homes in Sedgemoor

"The brilliant thing about Social Circles is that they are not only able to come and clear the garden but can also involve their clients in what they are doing. Bringing nature to people who are often stuck indoors with a new-born and a mental health condition who may be nervous or afraid to go out, is invaluable. For an organisation like Social Circles to bring community back into the home is very wonderful indeed and helps people feel connected."



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Thank you to all the Social Circles team for your expertise, dedication, contributions and hard work!



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Registered in England and Wales Company No 13601483

Thank you to all of our funders and supporters over the last two years!

