Family Initiative Supporting Children's Health (FISCH)

FISCH

The Family Initiative Supporting Children's Health (FISCH) project was established in 2017 by Joanne Dodds, a Youth Practitioner at Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust following a request from a young person who expressed an interest in wanting to develop skills around gardening and to learn the benefits of growing your own food. The project ran for three years taking advantage of the community garden green space at the Rosedale and Victoria allotments.

The Growing Health project was developed with the aim to provide a space for families to work together to spend time doing an outdoor green-space activity they wouldn't normally do, to take part in a physical activity, relate to food and to encourage children to try new things.

Growing Durham and DCA Community Development Officer Peter Samsom supported the development of the group and provided ongoing specialist support to carry out food growing activities with the families. Peter also educated the families on other environmental issues such as carbon footprint of food delivery, the importance of bees to the environment, recycling and composting.

As the Growing Healthy project developed, they began to consider potential ideas for additional community growing spaces they might be able to use to deliver services. They were looking for multiple locations across the county. DCA staff put them in touch with community gardens in Blackhill and Lauren Avenue in Gilesgate. They were a great fit as these spaces were having difficulties finding sufficient users to make best use of their space.

DCA supported the project staff to build their capacity to deliver the practical project work and over time the confidence of the staff developed. The project team are now self-sufficient and now check in with Peter less frequently for ongoing support. DCA's support enabled the project team to get their idea 'off the ground', built a programme of delivery activities and supported the group to connect with other community spaces.

DURHAM COMMUNITY ACTION

DCA has made a real impact to the Growing Healthy project team, by working with NHS staff to develop their own confidence in delivering growing activities as part of service delivery and by supporting the new services to expand across the county. The project is now being delivered in Blackhill, Willington, Horden, Gilesgate and Chester-Le-Street. An additional location is expected to launch in Shildon this year.

Families have reported that "it is great physical activity which in turn helps to boost your mind, provides an opportunity to meet new people and make new friends and improves the knowledge and actions relating to heathy diet and physical activity."

The project team say: 'A main highlight from this project is that everything the children do they do it from start to finish. The children love harvesting their produce, taking it home and talking about what meals and recipes they have cooked with it.' Families have also reported an improvement in school behaviour as skills learned from the allotment have been shared with class peers improving child's confidence and self-esteem and has increased their engagement, positivity and creativity.

At the community garden at the Rosedale and Victoria allotments, where the FISCH growing project was based, the Growing Healthy Project now works with a total of 55 young people in four groups every fortnight. Most of the participants at this site are referred from Parkside Academy in Willington and they are looking for longer term involvement.

Their hope for the future is to continue with allotment sessions and extend into the other beds in the garden therefore enabling them to open the project up to more families. In the long term, their vision is for the allotment to become more sustainable and for families to take ownership of the beds and continue to develop the good work that has already been started.

DCA is really proud of the work Peter has undertaken and we are privileged to support this community led activity.