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## Therapeutic Gardening Program for Adults in a Behavioral Health Facility

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# Therapeutic Gardening Program for Adults in a Behavioral Health Facility

Tam-Dan Nguyen, OTD-S

Dr. Ashley Jones, OTD, OTR/L & Lakeland Regional Health – Harrell Family Center for Behavioral Wellness



Picture of seed germination. (n.d.). <https://tinyurl.com/yjwvtbxb>

## Introduction

- The profession of occupational therapy (OT) was rooted in the behavioral health by engaging patients in psychiatric hospitals in meaningful occupations as a component to their recovery, which has evolved to include psychoeducation, practicing coping skills, and improvement of functional capacity by redefining priorities and values.
- The purpose of this project was to implement a therapeutic gardening program to promote a holistic occupation with sensory-rich components to improve physical and emotional skills needed to prepare for community reintegration.

## Site Description

- Lakeland Regional Health's Harrell Family Center for Behavioral Wellness offers inpatient, outpatient, and emergency stabilization services for adolescents, adults, and adults in a specialty care unit.
- Population and diagnoses include, but are not limited to, anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and schizoaffective disorders, and substance abuse.

## Summary of Needs Assessment

- In collaboration with the lead occupational therapist, it was identified that the implementation of an occupation-based group intervention would help to improve the patients' overall health and wellness during this crisis stabilization process.
- The following needs were identified with support from the current literature:
  - Develop or regain functional skills needed for activities of daily living, leisure, work, and social participation through people-plant interactions
  - Provide opportunities for community reintegration and daily functioning through the improvement of psychopathologic behaviors and symptoms
  - Promote social participation through group interventions
  - Increase autonomy, which, in turn, improved the self-esteem and motivation

## Literature Review Summary

- Clients in behavioral health facilities reported the desire to participate in activities, such as listening to music and going outdoors, but lacked stimulating opportunities (Foye et al., 2020).
- The engagement with plants, especially in a group setting, produced positive outcomes through the stimulation and improvement of psychosocial behaviors and social participation (Perrins-Margolis, 2000; Zhao et al., 2019).
- By using live plants as a familiar non-pharmacological therapeutic modality, research supported the improvement of psychopathologic symptoms within the psychiatric population, including clients with schizophrenia (Sisman et al., 2020; Oh et al., 2018) and depressive symptoms (Pieters et al., 2019; Saloman et al., 2018; Clatworthy et al., 2013).
- Pro-social behavior was evident through social interactions and the connectedness of experiencing chronic mental illness to accomplish the garden-related tasks (Perrins-Margolis et al., 2000; Pieters et al., 2019).
- The gardening tasks of pruning, watering, and transplanting were reflective of real-life experiences as clients with mental illnesses must focus on using fine motor skills, gross motor skills, social skills, and executive functioning skills (Cipriani et al., 2019).

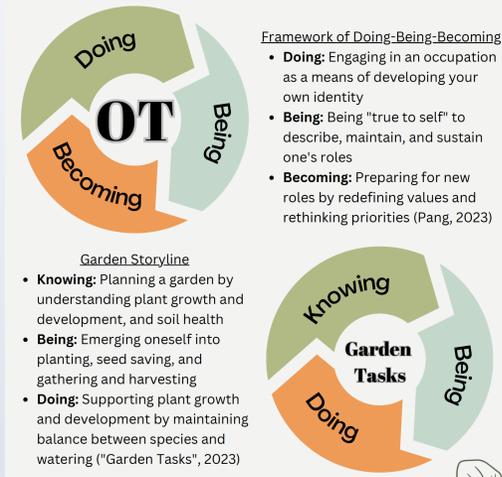


Figure 1. Correlation of OT framework and garden tasks (own photo).

## Capstone Project Description

The following capstone experience focused on clinical practice skills and policy and program development through a therapeutic gardening program for adults in behavioral health facility.

### Clinical Practice Skills

- Led group interventions for adolescent Unit (A).
- Led group interventions for all adult Units (B, D, E, & H), except acute (C).
- Led and modified group interventions for the Specialty Care Unit (G).

### Policy and Program Development

- Constructed a binder for the Behavioral Health Gardening Program.
- Developed a Standard of Practice for the program and five group protocols for the indoor and outdoor gardening activities.
- Collaborated with the Programs Director, Infectious Control, and Occupational Therapist about the safety of gardening equipment/materials.
- Obtained gardening equipment/materials and put together a mobile garden cart.
- Created various indoor and outdoor gardening activities that would meet the unit's level of appropriateness and function, as well as the weather outdoors.
- Made equipment log sheets for each activity to ensure all materials are accounted for and returned.
- Demonstrated group process and procedures to recreational therapists and social workers to assist in continuing the program.



Figure 2. "Tend to your mind garden" worksheet (own photo).



Figure 3. Personalized individual plant pots (own photo).



Figure 4. Plant pots with positive affirmations (own photo).

## Learning Objectives Achieved

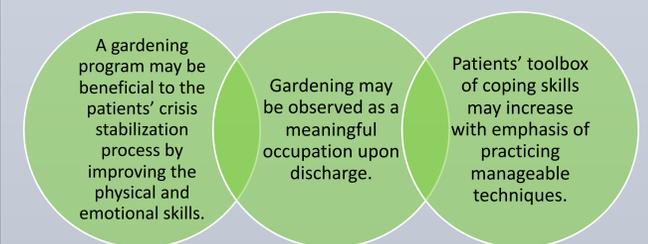
- Developed an effective therapeutic gardening program by adapting and modifying the group interventions to the patients' needs, and levels of function and appropriateness.
- Increased the understanding of the lived experiences of patients in a behavioral health setting and identified OT's role in mental health through supported evidence.
- Improved professional development with time management, organization, and professionalism as it pertains to program development and clinical practice skills.
- Became proficient in program and policy development by creating group protocols, and the Standard of Practice for the program.

### Lakeland Regional Health Harrell Family Center for Behavioral Wellness Occupational Therapy Group Protocol

Group Title	Outdoor Activity: Gardening
Group Membership (Size & Population)	Adult, SCU, Adolescent
Group Goals and Rationale	Research shows that gardening and nature-based activities improves psychopathological symptoms, encourages social engagement, and translates carryover of skills for community reintegration through plant-person interactions.
Outcome Criteria	This group will help pts create a sense of purpose in their lives by establishing roles during the group gardening process. Pts will also learn how to utilize garden tools safely and appropriately for carryover of skills needed for community reintegration.
Method	<b>Preparation:</b> Ensure courtyard is empty of patients from other units(s). <b>Introduction:</b> Begin by leading grounding exercise that is appropriate for the current population to prepare the pts to utilize their senses during this hands-on activity. <b>Start of Activity:</b> Pass out activity handouts, which include steps of the adapted gardening process and discussion points to be intermittently talked about during the session. Provide brief instruction and demonstration of tools. If appropriate, assign roles and instruct pts to work collectively to complete gardening tasks listed on handout. If needed, instruct pts to work individually, but encourage discussion. For the project, pts will use gardening tools appropriately to distribute soil, dig, plant seeds/herbs/vegetables, and water accordingly. Pts are encouraged to use hands to compress the soil into the pots carefully and calmly. <b>Close Group:</b> Facilitate reflection of day's activity. <b>Important:</b> Document when tools are used and returned in attached equipment log sheet. Sanitize tools following group.
Supplies	Activity handout, equipment log sheet, gardening tools (shovels, rake, and fork), sporks, Styrofoam trays, nontoxic soil or soilless potting mix, nontoxic seeds, herbs, or vegetables, watering can, markers, and paper

Figure 5. One of the five occupational therapy group protocols developed for the program (own photo).

## Implications for OT Practice



## References & Acknowledgements

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References Available Upon Request