

eden project



PRESS RELEASE

Veterans offered new nature-based therapy programme in peaceful Eden garden

Military veterans facing mental health struggles are being invited to take part in new nature-based therapy programmes set in a tranquil space beyond the Eden Project Biomes.

Eden, working in partnership with the Defence Gardens Scheme (DGS), has just secured a grant from the Veterans' Foundation to deliver the two ten-week programmes in the remainder of this year.

The sessions take place well away from the main visitor areas in the peaceful setting of the therapy garden at the former Vounder Farm on the wider Eden estate.

Veterans interested in taking part can join an open day there on May 18. The first of the two ten-week courses runs for four hours every Wednesday from June 1 to July 20. There will be another open day on September 7 and the second course runs from September 28 to November 16.

The programmes, delivered by Eden and supervised by the DGS, address the physical, emotional, social and cognitive needs of participants using the safe space created by the therapy garden.

The aim is that participants will create their own gardening plots, sow, plant and nurture vegetables and flowers in the wider garden, and in the process recall how to nurture themselves when they are at their most vulnerable.

Harvesting from the garden and polytunnels and cooking in the crib room and over the fire in the roundhouse will provide a chance to eat delicious food and to discuss healthy eating.

Retired Army veteran Mick Mullaney, who has just completed a Royal Horticultural Society course at Eden, will be helping to lead the new courses alongside Eden horticultural therapy staff Julia Durbin and James Clark.

Having never got into gardening before, Mick joined his course after feeling isolated during the early stages of the global pandemic. Now he is looking forward to helping other veterans.

He said: "It's been very therapeutic for me. I've never done anything like this. There is the physical aspect of the digging, the planting and the growing and then there is the calmness that this brings, and the camaraderie of working alongside others.

"I've been bitten by the gardening bug and have got an allotment at home now. It will be good to meet the new groups, to pick up conversations, and make friends."

The DGS is a Community Interest Company which works in partnership with veterans' charities, military units, community mental health service providers and gardening projects to develop, deliver and evaluate nature-based therapy.

The network is developing regionally on a 'Hub and Spoke' model of community-based mental health care and Eden is envisaged as their hub in Cornwall.

Funding for the Eden programme has come from The Veterans' Foundation, set up to help fund charities and other charitable organisations that are helping serving and former members of the Armed Forces, and their dependants, who are in need.

Sally Coulthard MBE, DGS Founder and Managing Director, said: "We are delighted to announce this new partnership with the Eden Project. It has been enabled by funding from the Veterans' Foundation and will offer bespoke transition support through nature-based therapy to service leavers and veterans in the South West.

“Significantly, it also acts as a gateway to an exciting range of progression opportunities that will support individuals to move into volunteering, retraining, part-time, full-time or self-employment.

“The Defence Gardens Scheme and the Eden Project are very grateful to the Veterans’ Foundation for their support in enabling this partnership, and we really look forward to building sustainable service delivery as we work together.”

Dan James, Development Director of the Eden Project, said: “Connecting people with the natural world is at the heart of Eden’s mission. This new partnership with the Defence Gardens Scheme funded by the Veterans’ Foundation enables us to build connections with the community of veterans and service leavers across the South West.

“DGS focuses on People, Place and Purpose and together we have all three: Vounder Therapy Garden in Eden’s outer estate is the Place, connecting with nature and increasing wellbeing is the Purpose and we are looking forward to welcoming People from the armed forces to this beautiful ‘Space to Grow.’”

A maximum of eight veterans per programme are being recruited with the help of NHS Op Courage, Defence Medical Welfare Services, SSAFA, Active Plus and other veterans’ organisations as well as local GP surgeries.

For more information on the new nature-based therapy programmes at the Eden Project contact Julia Durbin on jdurbin@edenproject.com and for DGS Sally@defencegardens.org

ENDS

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Captions:

Picture one: Retired Army veteran Mick Mullaney (centre) with Eden Project horticultural therapy staff James Clark and Julia Durbin in the therapy garden at Eden.

Picture two: Eden Project horticultural therapy staff James Clark and Julia Durbin with retired Army veteran Mick Mullaney (right) in the therapy garden at Eden.

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