

We wrote a series of articles this summer 2016 for the Landscape Show Preview magazine leading up to the Show in September (<http://www.landscapeshow.co.uk/Content/Press>) . It was an opportunity for us to whet the appetite of Show visitors ahead of our presentation on Wednesday 14th September. We wanted to focus on the key messages from our research and our work that we felt was important for our peers in the landscape design sector to understand.

April 2016: Article 1: Setting out to answer a simple question...

Garden designers Debbie Carroll and Mark Rendell from Step Change Design went on a research journey to answer a deceptively simple question: *“Why aren’t care home gardens more actively used?”*

“We had little idea at the beginning just what a transformative experience this would be,” said Debbie. 50 care homes across the UK and Ireland wanted to take part. The designers could see they weren’t the only ones asking this question; the care sector had concerns too. They scaled up their modest ambitions to work with 6 care homes and recruited 24 into the study in the summer of 2013. This was clearly an opportunity to gather definitive data to find out what the design sector may be missing in its work with care sector clients and particularly for those with residents living with dementia.

“When we look back at ourselves immediately prior to the research, it’s clear that we held some really powerful conditioning and beliefs about our work as designers and the design guidance we followed,” Mark said. “We aren’t the same people now as we were then. The research journey we embarked on has transformed our understanding of ourselves as designers and connected us to our other skill sets from earlier career paths in management and training.”

They had thought the answer would lie outside in the care home gardens themselves. However, a patch of weeds in a scruffy care home garden on their very first site visit turned these assumptions upside down. They needed to look inside the care setting, too.



May 2016: Article 2: Is a designer needed?



Garden designers Debbie Carroll and Mark Rendell from Step Change Design self-funded a research project to answer a deceptively simple question: *“Why aren’t care home gardens more actively used, even when they followed the latest design guidance?”*

Debbie explained, “The journey we embarked on has transformed our understanding of ourselves and forced us to address some underlying beliefs and conditioning we held about our role as designers.”

Mark added, “As a result of this project we are changed designers and people, too. By drawing on our other skill sets from management and training, particularly, we were able to grasp the role of care culture (the care setting’s work habits, regular practices and procedures) in determining attitudes towards the outdoors and activity levels in the garden.” For a long time during the study, the designers were facing the prospect that a garden designer is not essential to activate a care setting garden or increase usage by the residents. Debbie said, “We have created a practical tool called The Map that helps a designer work out how best to support their care setting clients.”

June 2016: Article 3: It's important to understand the care culture

Garden designers Debbie Carroll and Mark Rendell from Step Change Design gathered a lot of data from their research project about the way that residents and staff in care settings use their outside space.

Debbie explained, "We made three site visits to a number of the care settings in our study and this helped us to piece together the subtle role of care culture in making access to the garden easy or difficult for their residents."

Mark added, "The value of visiting a number of times over the summer months was that we could also check out the things we were told during the carefully arranged initial meeting and see for ourselves what was really happening outdoors. We then noticed the subtle effects of Health and Safety, different approaches to risk assessment and a range of Open Door policies."



The designers believe that it's important when working with care setting clients to check the information they are given in the Client Brief to gain an accurate grasp of the actual care culture in operation.

July 2016: Article 4: A care setting garden does not need to be pretty or tidy



Garden designers Debbie Carroll and Mark Rendell from Step Change Design have been reflecting on their evolving attitudes as garden designers as a result of their research into the reasons why care setting gardens are not used more actively.

Mark explained, "At the start of the project, we both held some subconscious assumptions that good design and a beautiful garden would be enough to help draw residents outside more. But our findings showed that this is not necessarily the case."

Debbie added, "In one of the gardens we visited, we were curious why a patch of buttercups and dandelions had been intentionally kept. We found it hard to believe that weeds would be welcome in a care setting garden. But the truth was that they were a really powerful element there."

Mark said, "These weeds helped a resident reconnect with her memories of spending time with her children outdoors, involved in those games where you blew the dandelion clock and wondered if someone liked butter. These weeds truly did help the resident to become settled and calm, all with the sensitive support of the carer she was with."

The repercussions from this observation forced the designers to challenge many of their assumptions. They were aware that they would have designed out the very elements in that modest garden that provided the most powerful healing aid for the resident: the weeds. Now, they would advise that lawns with weeds can be a good thing in care settings. They can provide a talking point, an aid for recollection and opportunities to do some weeding too.

The designers believe that care setting gardens do not need to be as perfect or as pretty as our sector may assume they should be. An emphasis on familiarity (of features and plants) and being domestic in scale is more likely to lead to meaningful time in the garden for the residents, their families and staff too.

August 2016: Article 5: Effective design support starts with understanding the care culture

Garden designers Debbie Carroll and Mark Rendell from Step Change Design have been reflecting on the key message they want to share with fellow garden designers from their research into the reasons why care setting gardens are not being used more actively.

Mark said, "Our message to our designer peers, and other outside specialists, is simple. If we want to avoid the risk that the care setting's investment in our work will be a waste of money, we need to start from an understanding of where they are culturally."



Debbie added, "For example, if the care setting is not using the outside space they already have, then a brand new garden may not be used after the novelty value has worn off because the setting does not have embedded routines of engaging with the outdoors regularly. It's important to design from where the care setting's culture currently is and not from where we think it may be."

The designers studied care culture at work during their research and identified a range of care practices and attitudes towards the outside space. It is this 'spectrum of care' that underpins their diagnostic tool, the Care Culture Map and Handbook.

Debbie explained, "If a designer uses the Map with their care setting client, it will help to ensure their work and support aligns with their current identified care culture position, resulting in a much more cost-effective design, and matching what the care setting will be prepared to use with their residents."

This is at the heart of their new approach to working with care setting clients. They call it 'Relationship-Centred Design', which entails a move away from one-off, entire-space commissions to more modest interventions, working closely with the care setting over a longer period of time to aid the setting along its culture change journey and increasing engagement for the residents in their outside space.



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Wednesday 14th September 2016
01:00 - 01:45
Debbie Carroll & Mark Rendell -
Step Change Design

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