

'Why don't we go into the garden?' A new poster

Debbie Carroll and **Mark Rendell** collected a mountain of data to find out what makes a good care home garden. They explain how it was turned into an infographic poster, inspiring staff to take a fresh look at their outside spaces

When we conducted a study to find out what ensured care home gardens were well used (Carroll & Rendell 2015), we collected a rich set of data on the way residents, particularly those living with a dementia, interacted with their outside spaces. Our research question had been "Why aren't care home gardens used more actively?" and the data we gathered have informed our design practices subsequently.

We recruited 24 care homes to our study and amassed almost 1,500 unique pieces of data, both quantitative and qualitative, via an adapted ethnographic technique called Environment Behaviour Studies (EBS) (see Chalfont 2008). Analysis of the data showed that those care homes with more person-centred care practices were using their outside spaces more actively, regardless of their condition or appearance.

Support for culture change

The outcome of this research was our *Care Culture Map and Handbook* (Carroll & Rendell 2016), which translated the findings into an interactive and engaging diagnostic tool for care home staff. It is intended to support the culture change journey towards person-centred care

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and bring about greater engagement with the outdoors.

Shortly after the map was produced, we were approached by landscape architecture postgraduate Donncha O'Shea, who offered to help us further analyse our quantitative data sets. What emerged from this additional analysis was a series of fascinating insights into how residents might be encouraged to venture out into the garden, which we have now incorporated into an A3 infographic poster that we hope will change perceptions among care staff about their outside space and inspire them to try something new or think afresh about what may be an overlooked area of the care setting.

Not only did the results affirm the power of gardens to provide meaningful occupation and an enjoyable experience, they also furnished additional evidence of what (and who!) helped to extend a garden visit (see box). Our weather data are especially revealing and - even allowing for over-estimating time spent outdoors by journal compilers in our study - it is impressive to see how long residents spent outside in a range of different conditions. It confirms our belief that the garden can be actively used throughout the year.

The new information revealed in the infographic poster should be read in the light of three key findings contained in the *Care Culture Map and Handbook*, namely the

significance of person-centred care for garden use, the dampening effect of fearful attitudes to "health and safety" on interaction with outside spaces, and the need to avoid over-designing gardens. Our findings were clear about the primary influence of people (staff, families and other residents) and care culture practices in increasing the use of gardens.

Reasons for ending a visit

In the new analysis for the poster we captured information about factors curtailing garden visits by residents. Interestingly, on a dry or bright day, the top three reasons for ending a visit were:

- 20% of residents just chose to do so
- 18% came in for a meal
- 8% came in for a cup of tea.

The reasons varied slightly on a cloudy or dull day:

- 24% felt cold
- 15% came in for a meal
- 14% of residents just chose to end the visit.

We felt that sharing these statistics would allow care homes to compare their attitudes towards garden visits with the homes in our research study. It was also possible to work out quite clearly what factors helped to extend a visit too, which for many homes

Spending more time outside

- Residents spent 50% more time outdoors when the visit was facilitated by a member of staff (or another person) or was part of an activity.
- On average, residents who were joined by a third party were likely to spend 31% more time outside than those who were not.
- 26.8% of residents who went outside had a meal or drink on a dry day (various conditions: sunny, some sun, bright, clear skies or overcast)
- Residents who identified a plant were likely to travel 36% further around the garden.
- Wheelchair users went 69% further than those not in a wheelchair.
- In wet weather, 47% of residents viewed the outside from inside; 39% went outside.
- Residents spent 20% more time outside when a seat or a bench was noted, mentioned or used by them.
- Average times spent outside by different types of weather:
Dry - 64mins, sunshine - 49mins, hot - 47mins, wet - 33mins, cold - 20mins, windy - 20mins.
Total average time spent outside - 41mins.
- We captured 304 different interactions, elements or activities that involved the outside space around a care home.



would just require small tweaks and adjustments to current practices.

We know that statistical data has to be presented in a meaningful way to the audience for whom this information is important. As we are not essentially “numbers” people, being more at home with a pencil in our hands and expressing ourselves graphically and visually, we felt that disseminating the findings from our quantitative data analysis would be best done via an infographic poster format.

Poster for display

A poster struck us as ideal because people can gather around it. It doesn't require a laptop or a smartphone to show our findings and it is meant to be displayed publicly for anyone in the care setting to be able to see. The infographic style we adopted also enabled us to reimagine 10 of the most insightful findings from the analysis in a simple and clear visual arrangement.

Our work with care settings is primarily about encouraging behaviour change by addressing care culture practices. The poster contributes to this work as a subtle means of interrupting deeply held beliefs and attitudes about going outside and is a useful tool to aid a reappraisal of outdoor spaces and their use. And for those homes already actively engaging with the outdoors with their residents, the poster demonstrates the value of doing so.

Above all, it articulates

some of the simple changes to habits and routines around care practices that default to indoor activities, however unintentionally, rather than exploring the potential of stepping outside. Time spent outdoors is so easy to overlook yet can be so meaningful in all sorts of ways: enjoying a meal, sitting on a bench, contemplating a much loved plant, watching a bird at the feeder.

Positive effects recorded

In our study we asked care staff and residents' families to keep diaries of visits to the garden. They all spoke powerfully about the positive effects of being in the garden, in nature and experiencing the sensory pleasures and memory prompts encountered outdoors. Here to end with are some diary entries stressing a few of the points we have made (names have been changed):

Residents walked around the garden looking at the flowers in planters. Residents then pegged towels out on the washing line. Mary said the flowers had burst into colour. William said there was no wind for drying towels. Weather: warm and sunny. Visit ended: ran out of towels. (Diary record 0256).

James and his wife did some weeding together, tied up the tomatoes and staked some of the taller plants. Speaking to James's wife she said it was great to do this in the care home as it makes him feel more settled as this is what they would do at home. Weather: cloudy and warm. Visit ended: reason not given. (Diary record 0301).



Above and left: The new infographic poster from Step Change Design

Care staff and families spoke powerfully about the positive effects of being in the garden, in nature, experiencing the sensory pleasures and memory prompts found outdoors

“It's lovely, it's not cold, I love fresh air.” Pam appreciated any outing to the garden. ‘I should get a tent and camp out all day’ Pam loved the idea of the garden club. As we were walking along Pam heard a bird sing and said “I think it's a blackbird”. When Pam comes outdoors, no matter how short it is, she goes back in “happier and brighter. Weather: cloudy and cool. Visit ended: went in for a cup of tea. (Diary record 0593).

Resident commented that it was a nice day and that the sunshine “wanted her to go out” and kept laughing about the sun. Walked to bottom of area, full conversation was about the sun, how she felt good, but at times seemed to drift into her own world and giggled to herself....I asked her to share her thoughts but she declined stating they were all her happy thoughts. Weather: hot, warm with rain showers. Visit ended: resident tired. (Diary record 0752).

Paula joined the group of 4 and sat on the patio chatting, watching part of the garden and playing dominoes. [She] loves to go outdoors and loved the afternoon activity, “what a well spent afternoon”. Weather: warm, sunny. Visit ended: resident had enough being out and getting chilly. (Diary record 0623). ■

References

- Carroll D, Rendell M (2015) Why don't we go into the garden? *Journal of Dementia Care* 23(2) 16-18.
- Chalfont G (2008) *Design for Nature in Dementia Care*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Carroll D, Rendell M (2016) *The Care Culture Map and Handbook*. Southampton: Step Change Design Ltd.