

ISSUE 6: AUTUMN-WINTER 2023/4

# Dose of Nature

## A nature-based, clinically-led mental health charity



Our purpose is to improve the mental health and wellbeing of our community through increased engagement with the natural world. Our work is rooted in a wealth of scientific evidence that demonstrates the physiological and psychological benefits of spending time in nature. We deliver 8-week nature prescriptions to people referred by their GP with a wide range of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, trauma, addiction, bereavement, ADHD, and long covid.

Our model is a positive, hopeful and outward-looking approach to mental health. Through education, first-hand experience and practical and motivational support, our chartered psychologists and dedicated, compassionate volunteer Guides, work with our clients to encourage a greater connection with nature. Our approach inspires lifestyle changes that have a significant and lasting impact on mental wellbeing.

Since we began in 2019, we have received over 1,200 referrals for people ranging in age from 15 to 95 years, from over 150 GPs, across 70 GP practices within the Boroughs of Richmond and Kingston, and across Guildford.



## Dates for your diary



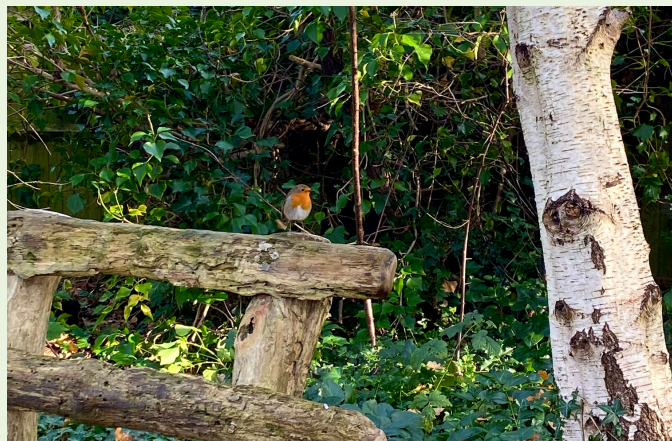
### 16 December: Dose of Nature Christmas Party

Please join us for our annual Christmas Party at Pensford Field from 4-7pm for some seasonal food, music, and festive fun! Friends and family welcome.

### 19 December: 'Winter Wonderland' Workshop for 15-18s

### 20 December: Christmas Craft in Nature

## News update



*As we approach the end of another successful year, we have many exciting updates to share with you.*

*This year, we passed the milestone of 1,000 referrals to our Dose of Nature Prescription Programme and we are now supported by over 100 volunteers.*

*To help us meet this growing demand, we have expanded our team, and are thrilled to welcome three new psychologists to the Dose of Nature family; Dr Cat Huckle in Guildford, and Dr Angharad Vaughan and Romina Richardson in Kew. We are also delighted that Rachel Clasby will be joining our operations team, as we enter our sixth year as a charity.*

*Alongside delivering our nature prescriptions and wellbeing workshops, we are proud to be working on research collaborations, adding to the ever-growing evidence base for the mental health benefits of spending time in nature. This summer, we began our year-long research project with the London School of Economics, evaluating the efficacy of our Dose of Nature Prescription Programme. Further projects include a study investigating the effectiveness of our Young People's Programme and an exciting collaboration with Kew Gardens.*

*In this newsletter, we are also pleased to share the latest news from our Guildford hub and an update on the development of our work with young people.*

*None of our work would be possible without the support and commitment of our Dose of Nature family of clients, volunteers, donors and supporters and we extend our love and gratitude to you this winter.*

*Thank you to you all.*



# LATEST NEWS

## Nature-based Groups

In addition to our one-to-one Dose of Nature Prescription Programme, we offer ongoing and unlimited access to a range of nature-based groups, helping people to connect with nature, and each other.



*Qigong in the field*

All our groups take place outside in natural spaces and many people are surprised to learn that they continue throughout the year, whatever the weather! Our more active groups, including walking groups and tennis are as popular as ever in the colder temperatures, and our newest group, Qigong in nature, has proved to be an immediate hit.



*Arts in Nature*

Our outdoor Mindfulness group, and our creative groups, including Arts in Nature, Knitting and Nattering in Nature, Slow Stitching and nature-based Creative Writing, continue under the shelter of the tree canopy or one of our trusty gazebos, alongside plenty of blankets, hot water bottles and warming drinks, keeping everyone cosy.



## Developing our Programme for Young People



As part of our Dose of Nature Prescription Programme for young people (aged 15-25), we are working with other local mental health organisations, including 'Off the Record', the Leaving Care Transitions team, and three NHS CAHMS services, to ensure more young people can access our support.

Our nature prescriptions take young people away from screens, decrease anxiety, increase mood, whilst building resilience, confidence, and self-esteem. They are fun, interesting, and empowering, encouraging the use of nature as a free and accessible resource that will last a lifetime. With no waiting lists, high engagement rates and impressive outcome measures, they have been well received by both GPs and young people.

We are delighted that our new psychologist, Romina, has joined our team to focus exclusively on expanding our Young Persons' Programme. She recently presented to staff and students at Richmond College on Mental Health Awareness Day and has since returned to the college to host the first of our new monthly drop-in sessions.

To support the growth of our offering for young people, we are also recruiting more volunteer Dose of Nature Guides, who have a specific interest in working with young people.



## Dose of Nature Growing in Guildford

We are immensely proud of the way our new hub in Guildford has developed over the past six months:

- We now accept referrals from 23 GP surgeries across Guildford and Waverley.
- We have trained 15 wonderful volunteer Dose of Nature Guides and are about to train our fourth cohort this winter.
- We have established a thriving programme of weekly group activities, including birdwatching, arts and crafts, yoga, tai chi and conservation groups, as well as riverside walks along the River Wey.

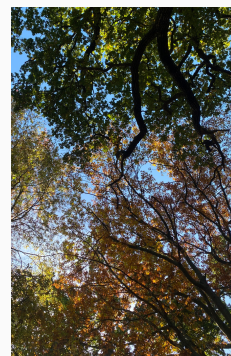


*We are thrilled to welcome our new Lead Psychologist Dr Cat Huckle (pictured) to lead our Guildford hub, based at the beautiful National Trust site, Dapdune Wharf.*

## Research into our Dose of Nature Prescription Programme

We are committed to advancing the research into the mental health benefits of engaging with the natural world. Dose of Nature's Prescription Programme has been the subject of research studies at a number of universities including the Universities of Surrey, Exeter, and Liverpool John Moores.

We are currently collaborating with two professors from the London School of Economics, on a year-long RCT (Randomised Control Trial) investigating the efficacy of our Dose of Nature Prescription Programme. As well as evaluating the impact on individuals' wellbeing, the research is measuring the effect of increasing people's engagement with the natural world on their pro-environmental behaviour.



Dose of Nature has also been the focus of a number of Masters students' studies, investigating different aspects of nature's mental health benefits, including a current project specifically examining the benefits of our Dose of Nature Prescription Programme for young people aged 15 to 17.





# WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE



## What our clients say

### Sam



"I went to my GP when I was completely and utterly broken. I use alcohol to medicate feelings and I didn't know how to cope. I thought my doctor would give me some sort of pill so that I could just sedate myself every day. They gave me Dose of Nature and I thought "are they crazy?!".

*I met my Guide who couldn't have been better for me. I trusted her instantly. But then I ran and started drinking again. I didn't think I'd get out of that. I actually thought I was going to die. I was medicating day in, day out. But my Guide never gave up on me. She persuaded me to come back.*

*And now, there's a huge difference in my life. I've always loved nature but I never took it into my life as much as I do now. I go out and I see beauty in the grass! I get excited seeing wildness and brokenness. It's made me smile again. It's made me go out and enjoy what's around me, and I don't think I'd be as positive or feel as safe as I do today if it wasn't for the help that Dose of Nature gave me. So I would recommend this to anyone. Just give it a try. Because I was like "I don't want nature, I want pills" but **the reality is it has changed my life.**"*

### Azra



"I've had CBT, and so much other counselling and so many drugs, and this is the thing that's really made a lasting change. Before Dose of Nature, I wouldn't leave the house, because I didn't want anyone to see me, I was so ashamed, I'd put on so much weight, I felt horrific. But my Dose of Nature Guide got me out, and she listened, and that was all I needed.

*I started walking 3 miles a day, and taking better care of myself, I started dressing a bit better, putting make-up on, and now I take my kids to school, I went swimming with them recently, I hadn't done that in so long, and I even applied for a job! This has just given me so much confidence.*

*I loved my Guide - we had such fun, we were always noticing things and she was always making me giggle. Being in nature just takes you away from yourself, calms you down, and that was all I needed, just going out and doing these walks, it really has made a profound change to my life. And **my whole family has benefitted** - my 11 year-old daughter now wants to go for walks for fun too!"*

### Barrie



"I spoke to my GP because I was having difficulty with sleep and relaxation and they suggested I try Dose of Nature, to deal with some underlying anxiety. My first conversation with a Dose of Nature psychologist was interesting and enjoyable, and I was matched with my Guide who I met weekly in local green spaces.

*I think one of the exceptional things about Dose of Nature for me was the opportunity to talk about myself in a non-judgemental environment with someone who just wanted to listen and gave positive and pragmatic help and support. Walking around the park released any inhibition, I suppose, because I could talk quite freely and my Guide was very personable.*

*Dose of Nature has given me an opportunity to explore my feelings and find ways to manage them in a more positive way."*

*After completing his one to one sessions, Barrie kindly went on to lead some lovely group walks for Dose of Nature this summer, along with a fellow volunteer, sharing their local knowledge of beautiful Bushy Park.*

### Denzel



"Everything seems to come at me all at once, and it gets too much. My life often feels out of control and then I always overthink things, which makes it worse. **Dose of Nature really helped me, and still is.** I really enjoyed my walks with my Guide, walking barefoot, and leaning against trees, and I now notice everything around me much more, and I listen to nature when I'm out, rather than listening to music.

*I don't usually open up, but just talking and walking felt really easy. And now I love coming to the groups - I feel great after playing tennis, and I love the art group - it just gets me away from my problems, and out of my head with all the overthinking. It's one of the best things in my week, and I know it's so good for me. Being around nature just makes me feel happy and it really does stop me from overthinking.*

*I've been coming here for a while now, and it's peaceful, it's calm. I love it here. This place really is amazing, everything about it. I come here with my own problems and everyone just makes me feel at home."*





# OUR COMMUNITY

## How do I obtain a nature prescription?

If you are struggling with your mental health, please talk to your GP about the issues you are facing. If you both decide that Dose of Nature appeals to your needs, please ask for a GP referral.

We are doing everything we can to keep our waiting lists short and will see you as soon as we can. Please refer to our website for more information on our approach.



## GET INVOLVED

### ...as a Volunteer

If you enjoy spending time in nature, are compassionate, empathic, and a good listener, and are interested in helping those struggling with their mental health, we would love to hear from you.

As a Dose of Nature Guide, you will receive training, professional supervision and ongoing support from our qualified psychologists.

We currently have volunteering opportunities in the London boroughs of Richmond and Kingston, and in Guildford. **Visit our website for more information and to apply.**

### ...as a Donor

Dose of Nature's psychologists, volunteers, donors and trustees are working to help hundreds of local people who are struggling with their mental health. **We are currently facing unprecedented demand.**

Regular donations allow us to deliver more nature prescriptions as well as our programme of group activities and wellbeing workshops for community groups.

By becoming a donor, you will be playing a vital part in making our local communities happier and healthier. **To make a donation, please visit our website.**

## Celebrating our donors

### THANK YOU!

We cannot overstate the contribution our individual donors make. We rely on your generosity and are hugely grateful. In addition, we would like to thank:



St Anne's Church, Kew



St Luke's Church, Kew



St Mary's Church, Mortlake



Particular thanks go to **Halletts** for helping us to share our story by sponsoring our newsletters.

Our donors form a vital part of the Dose of Nature family. Your continued support and confidence enables us to reach a rapidly growing number of vulnerable people.

Once again, thank you.

