## **Enriching the environment with a rural craft project: Nat the Scarecrow!**

This is a tale of a project to redesign and improve a small area of land, providing an outdoor reflection area and a craft work that helps demonstrate and explain some of the mental and emotional distress felt by our Greencare group members.

## **Heathrow Community Fund**



We started work because we received a grant of £1000 from the Heathrow Community Fund as one of their 'Communities Together'

grants (see www.heathrow.com/communityfund for more details on these grants!). This was very welcome – we have no sustainable funding and so are very restricted in projects we can undertake.

There was a small plot of desolate land that wasn't being used and was something of an eyesore on the site. We discovered when starting to clear the area some small 'sink holes' and decided that could be covered by a platform and the shed we so desperately needed to house our tools and craft materials.

While we toiled away at clearing the area (with some help from some volunteers!) we spent time planning out what we wanted from this area and what form our craft work would take. We thought of different ways of



presenting and explaining how mental illness affected us and decided to create a scarecrow with features

that illustrated some of the types of mental and emotional distress we feel.



During some sessions, when the weather was too bad to work outside, we sat and thought of words that match how we feel: a long list was complied then as a group we decided how 'important' each word was. From this we created a 'word cloud' where the size of the text indicated how important that word was to us.

These words and feelings are often not understood by doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists and other people. Often they make judgements based on the criteria they are taught to use to diagnose us. So, in contrast to the 'our words' diagram,

we took all the words from the medical

diagnostic criteria for a psychiatric condition called "Borderline Personality Disorder" (which includes a lot of the problems we have) and created another word cloud (here the size of the text represents how often the words are used in the diagnosis):



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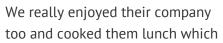
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When it came to putting up the shed we encountered problems. Some members of our group and staff

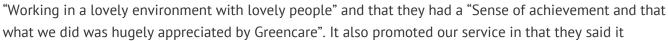


facilitators suffer from physical problems and weren't sure they were up to such a hefty job... Help arrived in the form of some 'corporate

volunteers', a team of staff from Vodafone who finished of the shed and put a pathway together in one day ©



we all shared in the yurt. The volunteers also seemed to enjoy the experience and gave some lovely feedback, that highlights included





"Raised my awareness of the value of the therapeutic community services provided by Growing Better Lives and Groundwork". A good day all round!

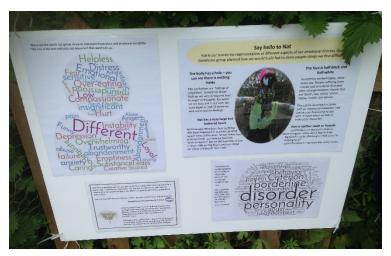
We carried on in subsequent sessions working on the area around the shed, laying a groundsheet underneath the path and covering the rest of the area with bark to prevent weeds. Herbs were planted in pots we painted to match the shed, primroses planted around the edges and our bench was placed into the area.

Time to work on our craft project – our scarecrow 
We discussed how we wanted him/her to show some of the feelings and experiences we have. We wanted to

express that horrible feeling of 'emptiness' we sometimes get and so made a hole in the body to represent 'empty'. This worked well since we made the body structure from a frame of chickenwire! The face is half-black and half-white: sometimes we feel happy, other times sad. People suffering from mental and emotional disorders often change between moods that are 'black', low, sad to 'white', happy, moods very quickly so we chose to paint the face black and white to represent this.



We named our scarecrow 'Nat' and Nat is neither male or female, so that Nat can represent all of us. Nat has a very large but battered heart, this is because we have also often been hurt by things that have happened in our lives, by what people have said or done. So our hearts have been battered – at times we have felt 'broken-hearted'. But we still have lots of love to share with our big hearts and care about our group and people very much.



We produced some information board to tell people visiting the site about Nat and about us. Then, at Easter, we hosted another group for people with mental and emotional difficulties for a say of fun – Easter egg hunts, egg rolling, shared lunch, and introducing Nat!