

Wellbeing Outcomes of Therapeutic Horticulture in the Singapore Context: Two Case Studies - Rehabilitation Patients & Young Adults with Disabilities

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Introduction

The benefits of therapeutic horticulture - active or passive engagement with plants and related activities to enhance wellbeing are well known. In particular, the American Horticultural Therapy Association has a comprehensive documentation on the subject (AHTA, 2021).

One key benefit is enhanced psycho-emotional wellbeing from connecting with nature. Negative moods (tension, depression, fatigue, anger and confusion) are reduced as the garden environment offers a respite from urban settings (Siu et al., 2018), and positive aspects of engagement, like vigour or energy, increase (Garcia et al, 2018). Therapeutic horticulture also enhances social wellbeing via the shared activity and sense of community, cognitive wellbeing from learning and practising various

skills, and physical wellbeing through garden work that can be targeted to improve fine motor skills, stamina / activity tolerance, and hand-eye coordination (Gerber, 2020). Furthermore, focused studies on older adults, a growing demographic of public health interest in many countries, have linked therapeutic horticulture to positive health outcomes (Han et al., 2018; Siu et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2018). A study in Singapore has shown that participants of a 24-week therapeutic horticulture program maintained healthy sleep patterns and psychological health, as well as showed significant reduction in anxiety and improvement in cognitive functioning. In addition, they reported an increase in mean happiness score after each session (Sia et al., 2020). The paper reporting the findings was accorded the Charles Lewis Excellence in Research Award by the American Horticultural Therapy Association in 2021.