

## **Institute for Public Health and Medicine (IPHAM) Population Health Forum and Poster Session**

**Background:** Healing gardens are used in hospitals and other health care facilities to improve health outcomes. Above and Beyond (AnB) is a non-profit outpatient treatment facility for persons recovering from various addictions. Many of the clients at AnB are homeless and view “nature” as a hostile environment. Thus, developing new protocols to introduce gardening and acquiring evidence of its effects is essential to determining whether and how to integrate therapeutic gardening into our practices.

**Goals:** Staff and stakeholder clients of AnB seek to partner with researchers from Northwestern University to establish a community engaged research partnership that has the potential to advance the science and use of therapeutic gardening in addiction recovery. Drs. Teresa Horton (Anthropology) and David Victorson (Medical Social Sciences) investigate the health benefits of nature; they wish to examine the therapeutic role of gardening in addiction recovery. When a person is trying to overcome addiction, the mind and body crave the substance that was triggering the reward centers of the brain and creating the high. Long-term addiction recovery requires discovering new modalities that are healthy alternatives to substance use, opportunities provided by therapeutic gardening. The ultimate goal of AnB is improve behavior through gardening. The aim of this project is to build a partnership based on the principles of community-engaged research including trust, bi-directional decision making, and cross-learning that will ultimately enable us to conduct research together that connects individuals in recovery with nature, the environment around them, and a sense of peace and purpose as they set out on a path to long-term recovery.

**Activities:** Over the course of the 1-year partnership development period, we will engage in the following activities, which includes 12-monthly meetings that focus on: 1) capacity building and co-learning (e.g., CER principles; IRB/human subjects training; garden program education), 2) partnership infrastructure development (e.g., MOU development), 3) future engaged research planning (e.g., research questions, design, procedures, measure identification, other needs), 4) partnership sustainability planning (e.g., future funding), and 5) partnership evaluation and dissemination. Initial efforts to survey garden use by clients have begun.

**Results:** To date the following activities have been initiated: 1) A kickoff meeting was held in August 2019 during which NU researchers toured the AnB facility for an on-site observation of programs and services. 2) Subsequently, monthly meetings have been held by video conference (Zoom). 3) A community advisory board consisting AnB clients has been convened to gather information on how clients feel the garden can be a healing resource in addiction recovery. 4) Information on training in human subjects research has been shared. Initial efforts to document use of the garden by clients indicate that clients gravitate to the garden during their free time, A portion of the garden has been dedicated to exercise and a therapeutic exercise group, named “MOVE” has relocated to the garden. Given that the clients are the primary stakeholders, we seek to engage them

guided by the Center for Community Health's Principles of Engagement which prioritize collaboration, respect, equity, transparency, and impact.

**Next Steps:** We have entered the third month of a 12-month project so we still have many steps in front of us. Future meetings will continue to review the research process, discuss the challenges and opportunities of addressing the behavioral health needs of clients and how a healing garden may help the process. We will identify methods to measure and monitor program planning, develop criteria for surveying client participation in the garden during the 2020 growing season, and plan future research collaborations and proposal submissions.