**Portmarnock Integrated ArchClub Health and Wellbeing Garden**

## **A Health and Wellbeing Garden**

A ‘Health and Wellbeing’ garden is a garden designed specifically to support the health and wellbeing of users through therapeutic and sensory engagement with nature. The proposed components of the ‘Health and Wellbeing’ garden will include sensory, active, and passive areas that support users to engage therapeutically with nature through meaningful and appropriate activities. These will include four key areas: A Community Garden Area; A Sensory Garden Area; A Passive Garden Area; A Social Activity Area.

* **Community Garden area** 
  + The aim of this space is to provide a growing space for members of the Portmarnock Integrated ArchClub (PIA) and the wider community to engage with nature through primarily horticulture-focused activities. The focus will be on growing food, herbs and plants that can be linked to educational programmes such as nutrition and cookery and therapeutic horticulture as part of the wider PIA programmes, while also providing members of the local community with access and opportunity to grow food, where such spaces and opportunities may not be available/accessible.
  + The community garden area will comprise of raised wheelchair accessible beds, potting shed/workstations, a composting area, and propagation area. It will also include key features to encourage wildlife such as bird feeders and bug hotels. The community garden area will include both hard and soft landscaping alongside wheelchair accessible paths. It will link directly to the Social Activity Area of the Health and Wellbeing Garden at the rear of the PIA building.

A collage of a garden

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## **Present Objective**

Our aim is to initially develop a community garden as part of an overall plan for a ‘Health and Wellbeing’ garden to meet the needs of the members of PIA, alongside those of the local community. We envisage an integrated approach where the needs of the members of the PIA and the wider community can be met through collaborative design and use of this space. Specifically, working alongside our partners in the community (e.g., Tidy Towns, and the VCSE sector) we aspire to integrate members of the wider community into the co-creation process in developing the community garden. In addition, we wish to support those members of the wider community who typically would not have access to a garden/growing space or who are deemed more vulnerable (e.g., living with a health condition, older people, people with disabilities etc) to engage with the community garden to support their overall mental health, physical health, and wellbeing.

To this end, our members with additional needs in PIA will co-create a community garden space supported by our local community volunteers, with consultancy input to inform the overall design and development of the ‘Health and Wellbeing’ garden and its component areas.

## **Future Objectives**

Once our community garden area has been established, we would look to seek funding to develop the additional components of the ‘Health and Wellbeing’ Garden. These include:

* **Sensory Garden area** – Garden area with sensory features and landscaping; incorporating sensory nature engagement through touch, smell, sound, sight, and taste and links to the passive garden area.
* **Passive Garden area** – Garden area designed to support immersive nature engagement activities, such as sitting and being in nature, alongside space for outdoor yoga/tai chi/relaxation/mindfulness.
* **Social Activity area** – Garden area with seating and tables for group and social activities, alongside hard landscaping/amphitheatre for group/performance activities that connects to the community garden area through a gated walkway.

## **About**

Patricia Darcy is a Health Sciences researcher, and her research interests include health and environmental psychology, nature-based interventions, greencare and urban green space design. She is currently undertaking her PhD exploring how nature can be used to support people living in the community with long-term health conditions. She works in partnership with people with lived experience to inform her research to ensure relevant, appropriate, and effective interventions.

She previously worked in the disability sector, in both residential and day services, and in a voluntary capacity in the community and voluntary sector as a subcommittee lead for the design and development of a therapeutic community garden. She has also led a funded Education Training Board of Ireland Greencare project (e.g., horticulture courses and workshops) targeting diverse stakeholder groups (i.e., those with mental or physical health condition) to support the delivery of positive health and wellbeing outcomes.

She has published on nature and health including a systematic review on the health and wellbeing effects of green exercise, qualitative research on nature engagement in those with a pre-existing health condition during COVID-19, evaluation of a green social prescribing project and book chapters on affective responses in natural environments and green exercise.