

# “Woodlands for Health” project, Ireland

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## Organisations involved

Coillte (The Irish Forestry Board), Mental Health Ireland, Health Service Executive HSE, Wicklow Mental Health Association, Wicklow Sports Partnership, University College Dublin.

## Aim

To encourage cooperation between forest managers, medical services, researchers and outdoor activity organisers to increase the therapeutic use of forests to relax, improve their sleep quality and promote physical activity.

## Target group

It is usually prescribed by medical professionals for adult mental health patients (Mental Health Ireland, 2017).

## What happens

The Woodlands for Health project has been running since 2012 in Wicklow in Ireland. It comprises a range of treatment programmes for people using Wicklow mental health services. Special guides offer nature walking programmes over 12-week periods that are accompanied by community mental health nurses. The walks are mostly of three hours duration and include a meal along with a shared experiences session. The main activity is walking. Occasional mindfulness sessions, nature and environment talks, woodland art and elements of yoga and tai chi shall be included in future (Burke, 2017).

Access to these forests and these walks are provided by Coillte, a commercial forestry and land solutions company that was formerly included in the civil service and is the custodian of 7% of land in Ireland (Thompson, 2016; Coillte, 2016). Guides include Coillte staff members, members of the partner organisations and project volunteers. They undertake SAFE talk suicide prevention training which is recognised internationally (4-hour listening skills course), Garda (Police) Vetting, First Aid training and walking courses (Burke, 2017).

The partnership between six organisations highlights the importance of cooperation between forest managers, medical services, science and outdoor activity organisers. The programme is provided as a public service for the benefit of local people. There is no fee applied and no intention of charging participants. Finance is provided through the partner organisations to deliver the programme (Burke, 2017).

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## Results of the programme/project/intervention

The project was evaluated by the Health Service Executive (HSE) and University College Dublin: The mood of the participants was improved by 75% and the quality of their sleep by 66%. Thoughts of suicide were reduced by 82%. A club that was developed by the participants as a direct result of the programme, to undertake outdoor activities together, illustrates the strong social component of green therapy (Coillte, 2018; Mental Health Ireland, 2017).

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## Reference

Burke, C., 2017: Personnel information via e-mail on Friday, 20.10.2017.

Coillte, 2016: "Coillte Annual Report 2016." [www.coillte.ie/media/2017/05/Coillte-Annual-Report-Accounts-2016.pdf](http://www.coillte.ie/media/2017/05/Coillte-Annual-Report-Accounts-2016.pdf) (last accessed: 10.12.2018).

Coillte 2018: "Our story." [www.coillte.ie/about-us/our-story/](http://www.coillte.ie/about-us/our-story/) (last accessed: 10.12.2018).

Mental Health Ireland, 2017: "Woodlands for Health." <http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/partnership/woodlands-for-health/> (last accessed: 10.12.2018).

Thompson, S., 2016: "Why a woodland walk is good for your head." [www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/why-a-woodland-walk-is-good-for-your-head-1.2475324](http://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/why-a-woodland-walk-is-good-for-your-head-1.2475324) (last accessed: 10.12.2018).

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## Website

[www.wicklowmentalhealth.org/projects/woodlands-for-health](http://www.wicklowmentalhealth.org/projects/woodlands-for-health)

[www.mentalhealthireland.ie/partnership/woodlands-for-health/](http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/partnership/woodlands-for-health/)

