

Health Inequalities—Case Study

January 2024

Identifying the issue

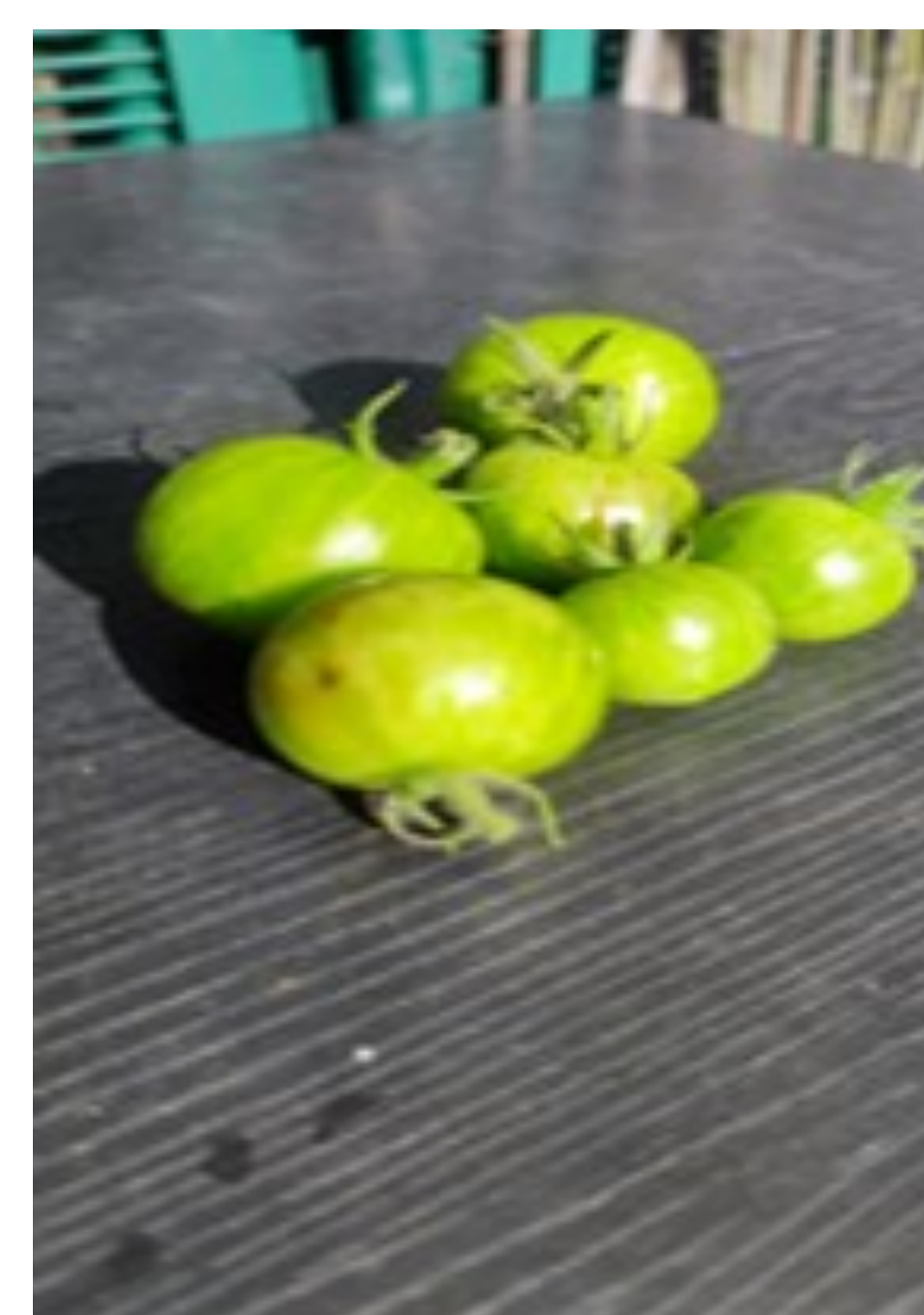
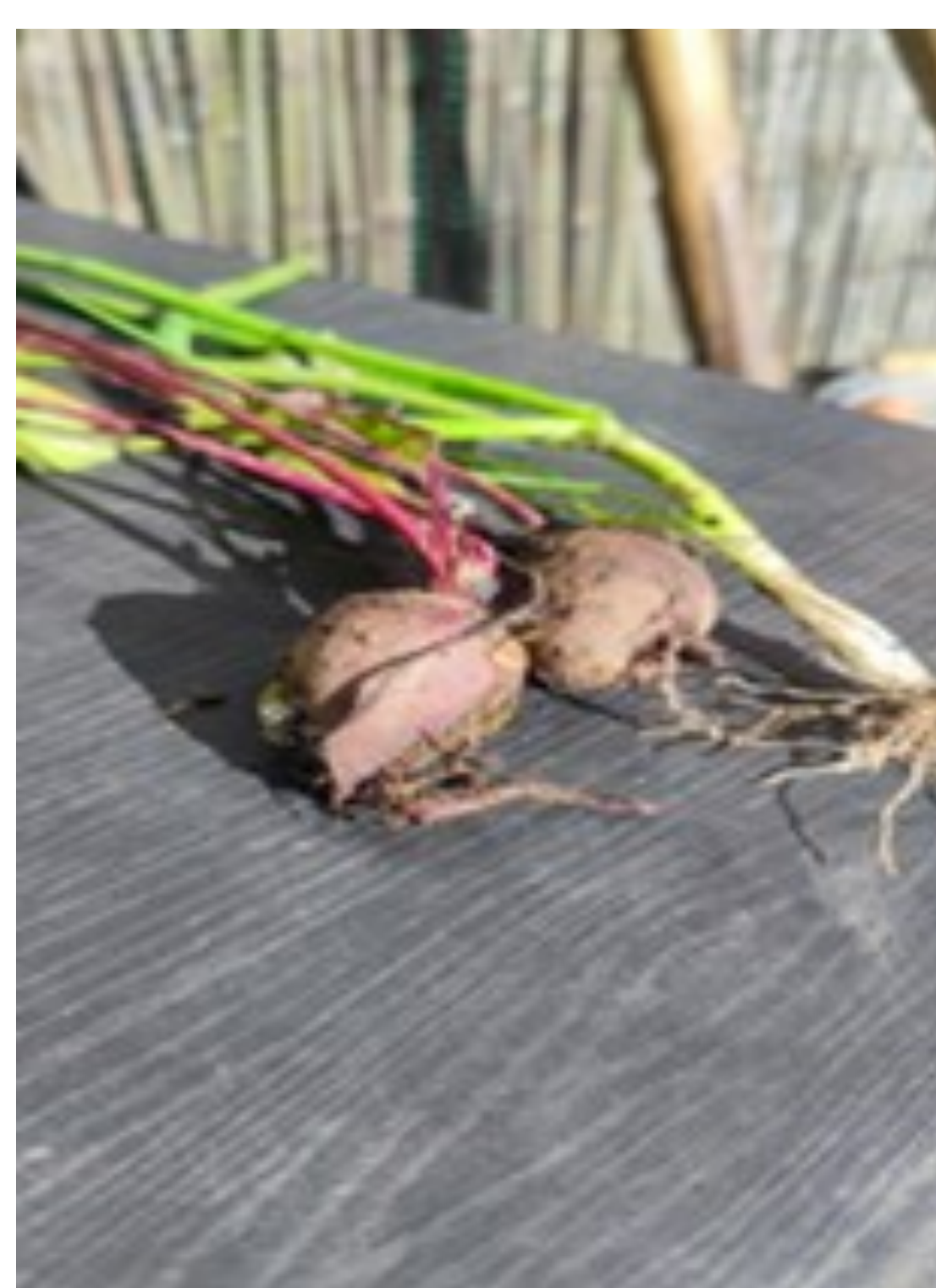
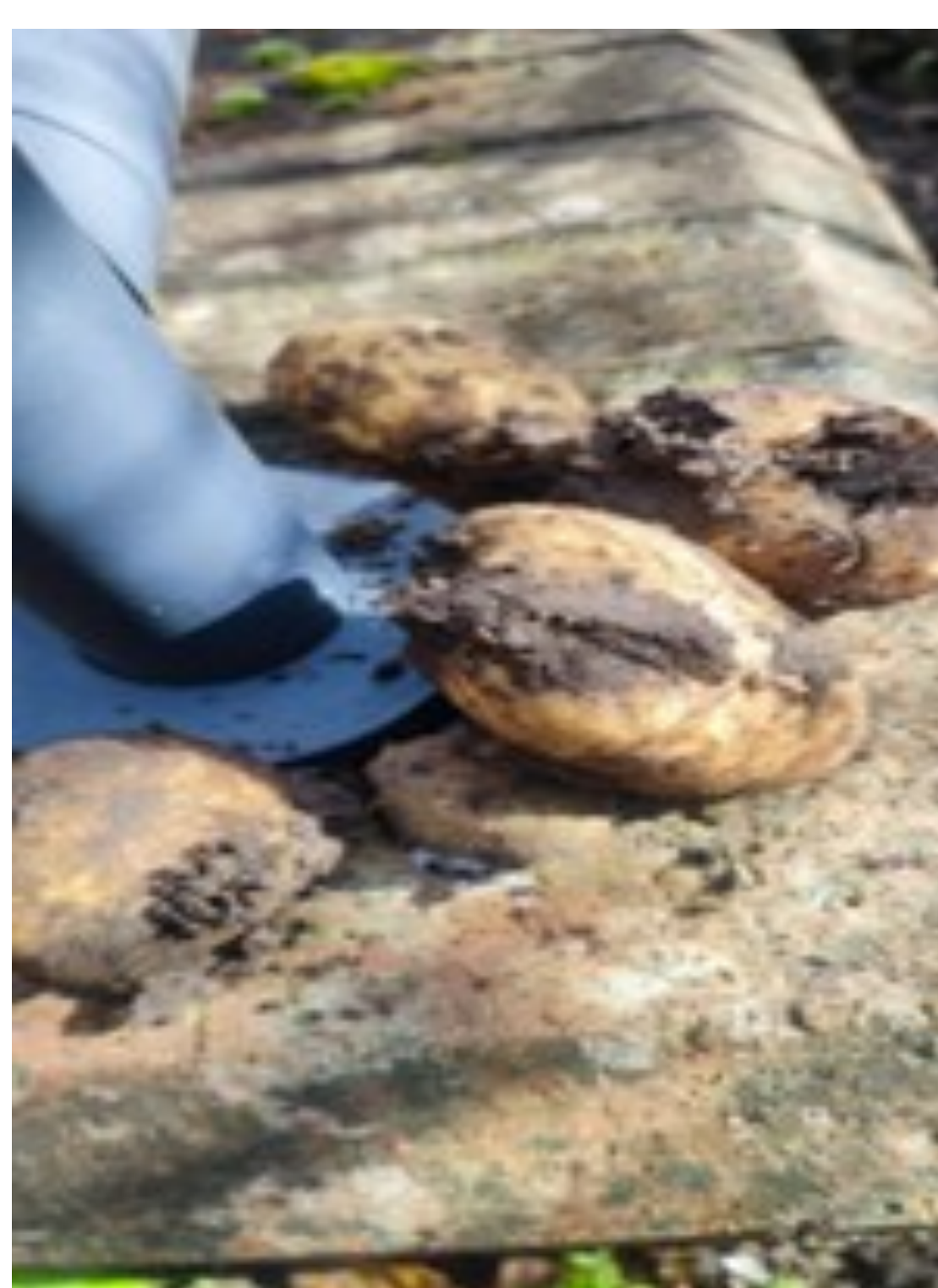
- Mill View Court Mental Health inpatient unit is a mixed gender, 15 bedded unit that supports and provides treatment to adults who are experiencing severe and enduring mental health. Some patients may be detained under the Mental Health Act and may also have leave restrictions.
- Many of the patients experience severe and enduring mental health difficulties, which can lead to anxiety and low self-esteem that can impact on motivation, loss of skills and confidence; creating barriers to accessing mainstream community resources. Patients may also commonly present with associated physical health issues and other social needs.
- Poor physical health is common in people with SMI with; many people experiencing at least one physical health condition at the same time as their mental illness and frequent diagnoses of more than one physical health condition at the same time as their mental illness (*Severe mental illness (SMI) and physical health inequalities: briefing, Public Health England, 2018*).
- The wide ranging opportunities provided through Occupational Therapy (OT) allow patients to develop new routines, relationships, and interests to support quality of life and promote recovery.
- At the weekly patient meetings, it was identified that patients wanted the opportunity to grow their own vegetables. This was seen as beneficial because it would provide opportunities to learn about; healthy foods, growing your own food, cooking fresh produce, new skills, develop confidence and social skills. This was also identified as a way to increase physical activity levels.
- The ambitions of the project are closely linked to [5 steps to mental wellbeing - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

Making the Change

- The team identified an area of unused outside space and gained management support for this project.
- There was a planning phase where the team and patients worked together to think about how the space could be used, how it would be cleared and prepared, the types of vegetables that would be grown.
- No funding was required to support the project and existing materials were used.
- The patients, OT staff and volunteer all worked together over a period of time to clear the site in preparation.
- The OT staff, volunteer and patients then worked together to carry out some research and learning from each other about growing vegetables.
- The area was ready for use from last winter, when the group began preparing for spring planting. It has been in use since this point with the patients growing a variety of vegetables over the spring and summer months.
- This project has inspired trips to local gardening centres to select plants and seeds for growing and cooking, it has empowered individuals and supports them with their mental health needs in a unique way.
- Led by OT staff, service users and a volunteer have now transformed what was previously an unused courtyard, into a calming and safe, nurturing environment.

Impact

- Mill View Court Garden project offers much more than just a green space. It has created an environment where individuals can come together to improve their confidence in social situations, improve their knowledge and interest in horticulture-based activities, and enjoy the physical and mental health benefits green spaces can offer.
- This includes regular access to education and advice on growing and nurturing of plants, as well as the other healthier lifestyle and provides sessions on growing and cooking your own vegetables and healthy eating.
- It has given staff the opportunity to spend time outside and develop relationships with patients.
- It has given patients confidence to continue to develop these skills and pursue them in a variety of ways when leaving hospital.
- It has increased patients' understanding of healthy lifestyles and led to patients making additional positive steps such as increasing physical activity and in turn reducing health inequalities.



Learning

- The value of **coproduction**—involving patients from the ward, has meant that the project has been a partnership journey. Understanding directly from patients allowed the Occupational Therapy (OT) staff to drive forward this important work which supports patient health and wellbeing holistically.
- The project demonstrates the need to look ahead of a person's current situation, and begin to **equip them with life skills**, at their own pace, that will support them in the future to **integrate back into their local community, living fulfilling lives, and pursuing their interests independently** in their own environments, which are key aspects of addressing health inequalities.
- You can find out more about the role OT plays in addressing Health Inequalities here: [Occupational Therapy Week 2021: #OTsForEquity - RCOT](#)

Feedback

"Being able to learn new recipes to cook and use the produce has been good"

"I have developed new skills and have enjoyed learning to grow vegetables"

"It has increased my confidence in a group"

"It's great to be able to engage in outdoor activities"

Next Steps

- The team would like to focus on gathering feedback and patient stories, so they can further demonstrate the impact of this project.
- They are hoping to keep up momentum throughout the next year, scheduling various events which fit with the seasons.
- Continue to signpost patients to community outdoors projects, forging new partnerships where identified.
- Continue to support patients with the process of applying for an allotment of their own.