

A church garden in the centre of a busy London district is playing host to the local NHS's trauma support services - providing a calm oasis for those in need.

A person receives therapy while in the garden of a church

Amid current Covid-19 restrictions, St Paul's Woodland Garden in Camden Square is providing a backdrop for outdoor therapy sessions.

St Paul's Church is part of the [parish of Old St Pancras](#) which covers some of the most bustling areas in the capital.

The Traumatic Stress Clinic (TSC) at the Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust worked with the church and Green City Projects to make the plan a reality.

Dr Livia Ottisova, a Clinical Psychologist at the TSC said: "Virtual appointments were fine for some but for the vast majority, they were not able to continue treatment due to digital exclusion and the challenges of doing trauma-focused therapy online."

Over the summer, however, the clinic was able to provide garden-based therapy sessions with 36 such sessions taking place by September and over 50 by the end of October.

Volunteers assemble around a plant box in a church garden

Dr Ottisova added: "The garden was the perfect setting for our work as it is safe, welcoming and contained.

"It offers the ideal backdrop for the challenging work of processing traumatic memories by providing a richness of soothing, lush sensory stimuli from the present."

The parish priest at St Paul's Church, Fr James Elston said: "It is a real miracle that a piece of forgotten church land has been transformed into a beautiful garden that is bringing so many blessings to all kinds of people in need.

"God is indeed at work in this small corner of his creation."

Notes to editors:

- Green Health is a Church-led initiative run in conjunction with the Conservation Foundation to encourages churches and faith groups to use their space for therapeutic gardening.
- The Church of England has seen an increased focus on supporting mental health.
- Manchester Diocese have employed a [Mental Wellbeing Youth Worker since 2018](#) and has found the provision to be warmly received.
- A church in [Croxteth Park, Liverpool](#) Diocese, has been praised for their mental health support offerings.
- Parishes in [Canterbury Diocese have funded mental health](#) support for children at school.
- The Church of England has published [mental health resources](#) including details of services and organisations which offer help and support.

