

Local community connects over nature at West Berkshire Community Hospital

West Berkshire Community Hospital and charity Earthwatch Europe, joined forces on Friday, hosting a Science Day at the hospital's Tiny Forest.

A Tiny Forest is a dense, fast-growing, native woodland made up of 600 trees planted in a tennis court-sized plot. They are not only an attractive location for wildlife but are great for people to enjoy as well, and can provide a range of benefits in the fight against climate change.

With the help of school children and members from the local community, data was collected to support research into carbon capture, biodiversity, flood management and thermal comfort. This data will now be used to assess how the Tiny Forest impacts the environment.

Planted in 2021, the Tiny Forest is an urban forest up to 30 times denser than conventional tree planting and so maximises the benefits per square metre of land, while having low management requirements, once established. The key environmental benefits of a Tiny Forest include carbon capture from the atmosphere, flood risk mitigation, supporting urban cooling, and its ability to attract over 500 new animal and plant species over the first three years

The Science Day was not only an opportunity to collect valuable data, but a way for members of the local community to connect with nature, engage with the research, learn about scientific methods used, and understand the benefits of having a Tiny Forest in the local area.

Organiser Christine Stockwell, Wellbeing Therapist at West Berkshire Community Hospital, said:

"The Tiny Forest not only supports the local wildlife and habitats, combat climate change and offers a range of educational tools, but it also brings a piece of natural beauty to the hospital. Our Tiny Forest is a valuable addition to our hospital, for patients and staff and as you can see today, the local community. As a wellbeing therapist, I spend a lot of time with patients in our therapy gardens which are hugely helpful with supporting the treatment of our patients. Spending time in nature is proven to help our mental health, and I hope that our Tiny Forest will soon be another space for patients to use."

Ben Williams, Senior Project Manager for Tiny Forests at Earthwatch Europe said:

"A Tiny Forest brings the benefits of a forest right into the heart of urban spaces, and it is brilliant to see the one at West Berkshire Community Hospital thriving. Hosting Science Days allows us to bring communities together, and it was wonderful to see the local children engage in our data collection which is so important for our research."

Notes to editors:

1. About West Berkshire Community Hospital

West Berkshire Community Hospital is located in Thatcham, Newbury. It offers a range of services including palliative care, rehabilitation, Diet and Nutrition as well as having an Urgent Treatment Centre.

2. About Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation

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Berkshire Healthcare

NHS Foundation Trust

Trust provides specialist mental health and community health services to a population of around 900,000 within Berkshire. We operate from more than 100 sites across the county but the vast majority of the people we care for are supported in their own homes. We have 216 mental health inpatient beds and 180 community hospital beds in five locations. Visit www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk

The Trust is rated by the CQC as Outstanding

Follow Berkshire Healthcare on Twitter @BHFT, Facebook

www.facebook.com/berkshirehealthcare and on Instagram @berkshealthnhs

3. **About Earthwatch Europe - www.earthwatch.org.uk**

Earthwatch is an environmental charity with science at its heart. They drive the change needed to live within our means and in balance with nature. They do this by:

- Connecting people with the natural world
- Monitoring the health of our natural resources
- Helping people take action to have a positive impact.

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