

Study shows smartphone app could be a 'green prescription' for mental health

October 22 2019



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A study that prompted users to record the 'good things' in nature in urban areas, such as trees, flowers and birds, has found that a smartphone app can bring clinically significant improvements in mental health.

A University of Derby team led by Professor Miles Richardson and involving colleagues from the University of Sheffield, examined the

responses of more than 582 residents of Sheffield, including 150 people with a [mental health](#) condition.

When near an urban green space, they were prompted by the research app to notice and record the good things in nature every day for one week.

The findings, published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, show a clinically significant and [positive effect](#) on wellbeing not just at the end of the seven-day period, but one month later when a follow-up assessment was carried out.

This was particularly the case for people:

- With mental health difficulties
- Who had spent more time outdoors as children
- Who had spent little time outdoors in the 12 months prior to taking part in the study.

Miles Richardson, professor of Human Factors and Nature Connectedness at the University of Derby, said the study showed promise that a smartphone-based 'green prescription' to connect with nature in [urban areas](#) could play a role in delivering mental health and wellbeing.

He explained: "Providing everyday opportunities to improve wellbeing and reduce health inequalities through engaging with urban nature with a brief, portable, widely accessible and cost-effective [smartphone app](#) intervention is of interest to [public health](#) organizations seeking solutions to mental [health](#) crises in an increasingly urbanized society."

Dr. Kirsten McEwan, senior researcher at the University of Derby, said: "Adults spend, on average, less than 8 percent of their time outside, so to

see the positive impact it had on those who spend little time outdoors suggests that there is a need for engagement with nature in everyday life. Just noticing simple things in nature, such as trees, skies, flowers, birds and wildlife, can have a beneficial impact."

David Sheffield, Professor of Psychology at the University of Derby, said: "The findings also provide evidence that exposure to nature in childhood is important to help adults achieve a sense of wellbeing by renewing and reigniting that connection."

The University of Derby team and Furthermore, the company which developed the app for the study, are working with walking app [Go Jauntly](#) on a new version which could be rolled out in 2020.

Steve Johnson of Furthermore said : "We're excited to see the results of the study and the positive effect of urban nature on our [wellbeing](#). This really begins to pave the way for more proactive "Green Prescriptions' and we are planning to continue to work with the university to bring this noticing the good things in nature feature-set to the Go Jauntly app."

More information: Kirsten McEwan et al. A Smartphone App for Improving Mental Health through Connecting with Urban Nature, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph16183373](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16183373)

Provided by University of Derby

Citation: Study shows smartphone app could be a 'green prescription' for mental health (2019, October 22) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-10-smartphone-app-green-prescription-mental.html>

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