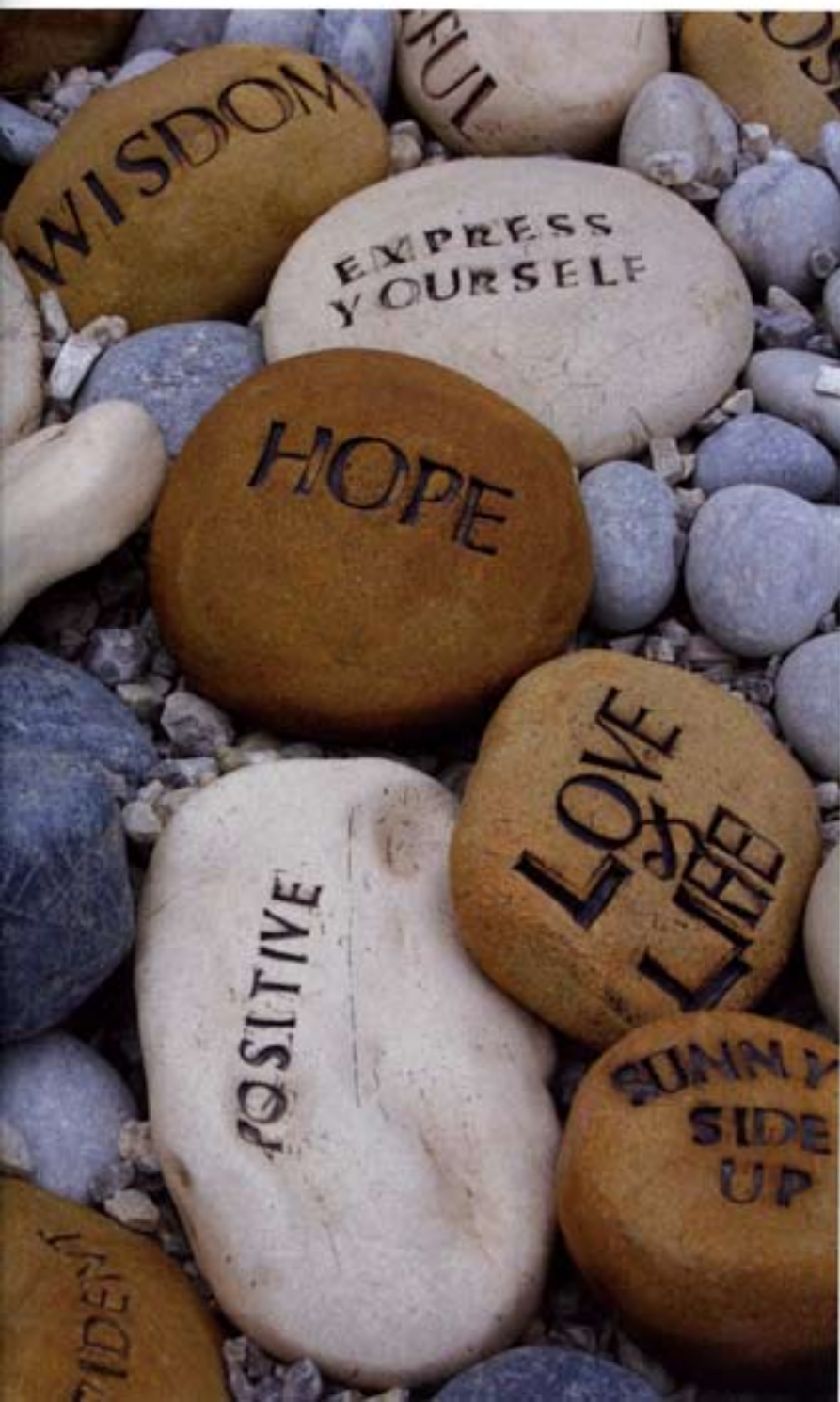


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growth POINT

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using gardening to change lives

INNER WORD GARDEN

START IN MANCHESTER: SPREADING THE WORD ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

Wendy Teall, Start Lead Artist

WHO ARE WE?

Start in Manchester has been working in mental health in a socially inclusive way for 20 years. Using art and gardening as our vehicles, we work with people who are recovering from a period of serious mental distress, helping them to rebuild confidence, make links to their local community and find new roles. Start is part of Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust. We are a team of specialist artists, a horticulturalist, an administrator and an occupational therapist. We work closely with other Trust mental health staff.

The chance, in just a few days, to influence an audience of thousands about their perceptions of mental health issues, does not come along very often. But that was the opportunity presented to Start when we were invited to take our 'Inner Word Garden', to the Royal Horticultural Society Flower Show at Tatton Park this summer.

INNER WORD GARDEN

Inspired by a Zen garden of contemplation, the Inner Word Garden features 100 hand-made ceramic pebbles. They nestle like a riverbed amongst cobbles, slates, gravels, and plants. Each of the hand-made pebbles has a word inscribed on its surface. The words describe the experience of journeying through a period of mental or emotional distress towards recovery. Many of the pebbles reflect the important role which art and gardening, and Start's service, have played in the makers' lives.

Visitors to the RHS show were intrigued by the installation. We invited them to walk through the garden, touch and read the pebbles, and talk about the ideas behind the work. The fact that the installation was made by Start service-users made it especially moving and inspiring to visitors. They could see real journeys people had taken through very difficult times, and could also observe how it is possible to learn to care for your emotional health through involvement in creative activities such as gardening and art.

A team of staff and service-users ran the Start RHS show-stand, using the time to tell visitors about Start, and to promote the value of gardening and art to mental wellbeing. We also encouraged visitors to think about their own and others' mental health, by completing a short mental health quiz, discussing health issues, illness, stress and relaxation, and distributing self-help literature.

All told, over the five scorching hot days of the show, at least 18,000 visitors saw our garden, and more than 3,000 took away information about our service. We had many compliments and were amazed and touched by the warmth of responses from show-goers to our mental health theme.

However, we still had one final surprise to come. The Inner Word Garden was awarded a prestigious Certificate of Special Commendation by the RHS judges at the Tatton Show in recognition of the installation's quality, and the value of Start's mental health promotion work.

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