



SIG Penrose Roots Impact Report

2024/25

Support us





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Our Offer

SIG Penrose Roots, known as Roots, is a Community-Based Recovery Service (CBRS) that specialises in supporting socially isolated people who struggle to engage with their local community. Our non-clinical approach and accessible platforms help people build friendships and social networks, engage in community, and take a learning journey towards upskilling.

For many, coming to Roots is the only time they socialise outside their homes, participate in activities independently, and meet new people.

Roots operates across three different sites in Luton and Bedfordshire, providing opportunities for people to get involved.

Support

Access to community-based activities, therapeutic open spaces and workshops.

An extensive range of non-clinical support services, training programmes, and social groups designed to empower and boost health and wellbeing.

Natural Living

Opportunities to grow organic food, promote healthy eating, and reduce food insecurity.

Access to healing opportunities in the natural environment and community settings.

Community

Create spaces where people can come together and build a community.

Participate in activities with others, talking and receiving support from an understanding network of people via peer support.

Community events like harvest celebrations and garden open days.

Experienced members become peer mentors, providing guidance and support to newcomers.

Our Services

SIG Penrose Roots to Recovery Garden - Cranleigh Gardens, New Bedford Road, Luton, LU3 1LL

Roots to Recovery (R2R) is an award-winning therapeutic growing space where people experiencing social isolation and mental health challenges can connect with nature and each other. Located on a one-acre site in Luton, R2R offers members a welcoming environment to cultivate fresh, nutritious produce that is prepared in shared meals, taken home by members, or donated to local food hubs addressing community food insecurity.

Beyond food production, R2R creates opportunities for people to build confidence, develop practical skills in horticulture and cooking, and form meaningful social connections. The project's trauma-informed approach ensures everyone is valued for their contribution, creating a non-judgmental space where members can experience the therapeutic benefits of gardening while being part of a supportive community that promotes recovery and wellbeing.

SIG Penrose Connects - Strathmore Avenue Methodist Church, Strathmore Avenue, Luton, LU1 3NY

Connects creates pathways for inclusion, recovery, and personal growth for individuals experiencing social isolation. Meeting weekly in Luton, this welcoming social group provides a relaxed environment where members engage in varied activities designed to build confidence, develop new skills, and foster meaningful connections with others.

Through a programme of engaging workshops covering topics from healthy living to creative expression, Connects supports members' wellbeing and independence while providing opportunities to develop employability skills. The supportive, non-judgmental atmosphere encourages peer relationships and mutual support, with many members progressing to volunteer roles where they can share their lived experience to benefit others.

SIG Penrose Roots to Success - Glasshouse 2, Stockwood Discovery Centre, Luton, LU1 4LX

Roots to Success (R2S) operates from a spacious glasshouse in Stockwood Park, Luton, expanding the horticultural opportunities available to members beyond the Roots to Recovery Garden. This innovative project combines advanced growing techniques with vocational training, enabling members to develop specialist skills in a professional growing environment.

As a developing social enterprise, R2S contributes to local sustainability by selling locally grown plants and flowers through Stockwood Park's gift shop, generating income to support the service while providing members with meaningful opportunities to engage with the wider community. The project's unique combination of wellbeing support and skills development creates pathways toward greater independence and confidence for people experiencing mental health challenges and social isolation.

SIG Penrose Recycle-A-Bike Workshop - Studios 3-5, Stockwood Discovery Centre, Luton, LU1 4LX

Recycle-A-Bike Workshop combines practical skills development with environmental awareness, teaching members to repair and refurbish donated bicycles. Based at Stockwood Park in Luton, this hands-on programme equips people with valuable technical knowledge in bike maintenance and repair while promoting sustainability through the reuse of materials that might otherwise go to waste.

The project serves multiple community benefits, with refurbished bicycles being provided to members and the wider public, increasing access to affordable transportation. The workshop also creates customised bike designs to accommodate the needs of people with physical disabilities, breaking down barriers to mobility and independence while fostering a sense of achievement among members who contribute directly to improving others' lives.

SIG Penrose Wood Workshop - Studios 3-5, Stockwood Discovery Centre, Luton, LU1 4LX

Wood Workshop provides members with opportunities to develop practical woodworking skills through hands-on projects using recycled materials. Located next to the Recycle-A-Bike Workshop at Stockwood Park, this creative space enables people to learn basic carpentry and DIY techniques in a supportive environment where creativity and learning are encouraged.

Members participate in both weekly sessions and one-off projects, creating items for use in natural settings and garden environments within Roots' projects and the wider community. The workshop builds confidence, problem-solving abilities, and teamwork skills while offering a therapeutic creative outlet that contributes to members' recovery journeys and sense of achievement through making something tangible and useful.



Our Methodology

Roots aims to provide accessible platforms for building friendships, social networks, and community engagement for people who feel socially isolated and struggle to connect with their local community. Roots supports individuals at their most vulnerable, helping them reach their potential by making them feel valued, regardless of their past or current circumstances.

Removing Barriers

There are no referral criteria and no limitations on intensity, frequency, or lengths of support.

We accept referrals from healthcare professionals, partner agencies, and self-referrals.

People in the community who may not qualify for support from elsewhere can access Roots.

Flexibility

We adopt a flexible approach to empower members with choice and control over their support.

Members can choose which of the Roots programmes they attend and how they choose to participate.

Non-attendance does not require re-referral.

Led by Lived Experience

Services are designed and delivered by and for the community.

Members are encouraged to co-produce activities, enabling people with lived experience to tailor and design the service.

Roots is a continually evolving service that responds to community needs.

Non-Clinical Support

Aiding people in their recovery through community-based interventions.

Providing an extensive range of non-clinical therapeutic support services, training programmes and social groups designed to empower and boost health and wellbeing.

"I like the fact that Roots is open for all."

Roots Member, 2023

Although there are commonalities among the people who attend Roots, each person has differing experiences and challenges and requires varying levels of support. For this reason, we do not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach; instead, each person can tailor Roots' offerings to suit them. This means some people will attend all of Roots' projects, while others may only participate in one. Some may remain Roots members for years, while others may only require Roots' services for a few months.

The below graphic outlines a typical journey for a Roots member:



Our Beneficiaries

Our regular attendees have lived experience and joined Roots because they were experiencing or recovering from:



“In 2015 I was going to be made homeless, so I went to Penrose for housing support, and then while they were supporting me I was asked if I’d like to do some volunteering work down at the garden, and then 2019 I become fully employed as a Project Leader at Penrose Roots to Recovery. Penrose has helped me tremendously.”

Peter, Roots Project Worker



“The love and support I’ve received here have allowed me to grow into a more grounded, confident and authentic version of myself.”

Roots Member

Growing Something Special - Roots' Story

On the 17th of December 2012, I started working for Penrose. I had a background in criminal justice, and this was my first role on the helping side rather than the what seems to be the set-up-to-fail side that I had been on. Within a few months, I noticed how grey and depressing it can be in a large town, as I was born and raised in the countryside, and also the lack of green spaces, or connected green spaces, if you like.

After a few months of conversations with participants who would create a crisis to have positive human contact, their wish to meet outside as many had no access to their own garden, as well as seeing a gardening project on the local news of a drug and alcohol service in Cambridge and the good work they were doing, I asked our then CEO Gill if I could start an allotment project.

So, off I trundled to speak to the local authority and got us a plot on a local allotment. Every Thursday, with the support of my fellow team members at Synergy, we would load our cars with willing members and head to the other side of Luton. This went well, and the conversations we could have in a natural, nature and nurture-based setting were just amazing. To raise more funds, we would help other allotmenters with their gardens, and they would donate seeds, tools or a bit of cash for us to grow.

One year later, I was never happy with what I had! I asked the local authority if we could have our own space to grow Roots. After a few months of visiting sites around Luton, we went to an unused allotment space next to the A6 on the way into Luton. The area had been decommissioned as allotments as the rabbits and other wildlife ate all the produce. Hey, we all need to eat right!

This is when I met the wonderful William and Peter who were also willing to come along on this incredible journey! Long story short: 11 years later, staff team of 8 amazing individuals, 90+ members, five different projects providing 100's of kg of food to our members and the wider community, 3200 open hours for support per year, 6 days per week, across Bedfordshire, the "go to" provider to many external services looking for holistic support for the clients, award winning, palace visiting, bicycle donating, woodworking, connecting, skills-building goodness. I could go on, or you could read the rest of this amazing impact report.

But also come and visit, Roots is not something that can be explained: it is something you feel. Sound strange? Then I invite you to come along and challenge you not to feel the magic of community and the magic of Roots!



Samantha Smith

SIG Penrose Roots Service Manager
since 2013

Highlights

Since 2022, Roots has:

Provided
2,926
volunteer
hours

Donated **2,733**
hours of local
conservation

Provided
10,685 hours
of support

Delivered
338
workshops

Supported
2,884
people

Grown
1,624kg of
produce

Donated **1,432kg**
of freshly grown
produce to the
local community

Delivered
2,231 sessions
across all
programmes

Recruited **21**
volunteers

Donated **137**
repaired bikes to
people in need

*"The work of you and your team
is critical and life changing for so
many people who are referred to
you from the Luton Community
for help and support."*

Deputy Lord Lieutenant of
Bedfordshire, April 2024

Recent Achievements:

On 20th September 2024, Roots marked its 11-year anniversary.

Roots won Environmental Achievement of the Year at the Luton's Best Awards 2025.

Roots has secured multi-year funding (3 years) from the BLCF / LLA Community Investment Fund and The National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund.

Roots staff and members worked with Wildlife Trust to plant a total of 120 trees to form a protective hedge habitat.

A successful Green Social Prescribing Event was held at Roots to Recovery Garden, hosting partners including Wildlife Trust, Natural England and NHS.

Roots staff and members participated in an apple amnesty with Edible Hightown, turning 135kg of apples into juice donated to the community.

Roots staff and members laid a 38-metre wildlife corridor by the River Lea in collaboration with Luton Orchards, Wildlife Trust, and a local woodworker.

The oak saplings that Roots' staff and members have been nurturing on behalf of Luton Council and the Wildlife Trust, were planted in their permanent place in the community.



Impact Report

Overview

The following pages detail Roots' work to demonstrate the project's impact across Luton and Bedfordshire. The information is categorised across seven thematic areas, including:

- Community
- Mental & Physical Health
- Neurodiversity
- Education, Training and Employment
- Criminal Justice
- Sustainability & Environment
- Food Support

We have linked how Roots responds to Luton 2040 pledges, including:

- Building a more inclusive economy
- Improving wellbeing and addressing inequalities
- Becoming carbon neutral, protecting the environment
- Supporting children and young people
- Promoting fairness, community cohesion, and local pride

We collected the information presented via the following activities:

- Data collected and recorded for members and activities on our Case Management System as part of our monitoring processes undertaken by Roots' staffing team.
- Quarterly feedback questionnaires where members, volunteers and staff can give their thoughts and opinions on the service provided.
- Focus Groups/Away Days: Members, volunteers, and staff are invited to sessions to have open discussions on the service, which allows them to dive deeper into what is working well and what isn't.
- Interviews with members to document case studies.
- Photography and videography.

Community

Our Work

Providing a welcoming, non-judgmental space where people from diverse backgrounds can come together and form meaningful connections

Offering regular social activities and groups that bring people together each week to engage in skill-building, conversations, and recreational events

Fostering a strong sense of belonging, acceptance and community among members, volunteers and staff

Enabling members to be active participants in the community through opportunities to contribute skills, share experiences, and support one another

Partnering with local organisations and groups to expand community partner networks and create more opportunities for Roots' members to get involved

Aims & Background



Socialisation

Social isolation

Social Isolation

Social isolation is estimated to cost around **£9,900 per person per year** due to its combined impact on wellbeing, health, and work productivity. (1)

The **majority of people** first attend Roots at a time when they are **socially isolated**.



New friendships

Lack of engagement

Loneliness

60% of chronically lonely people experience **mental distress**, compared to 15% of those who are not chronically lonely. (2)

62% of lonely young people report themselves **losing self-confidence due to loneliness**. (3)

Outcomes

New Friendships



100%

In our latest members' survey, **100% of members reported to have made new friendships** since attending Roots, with 55% of members continuing to meet their new friends outside of Roots.

Growing Community



61%

61% more members have been supported by Roots in 2024 (1,124) than in 2021, when we were still recovering from COVID (437), demonstrating the growing reach and impact of the Roots in the local community.

References: (1) Loneliness Monetisation Report, Analysis for Dept for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), 2020; (2) Investigating factors associated with loneliness in adults in England, DCMS, 2022; (3) A Friend in Need Report, Co op Foundation, 2022



Case Study

Joe, Roots Member since 2016

Joe has several mental health diagnoses and has experienced mental ill-health for most of his life. Joe spent many years on inpatient mental health wards and was struggling with substance use. When he wasn't in hospital, he struggled to leave his home, leading him to be socially isolated and worsening his mental health. In 2016, Joe's Mental Health Support Worker invited him to Roots. Joe was apprehensive, but he agreed. The decision to attend was a huge step for him.

Accompanied by his Support Worker, Joe first visited Roots 2 Success. When he arrived, he was welcomed by the Roots team and members, but after five minutes, Joe found the new environment overwhelming and wanted to leave. The Roots team and Joe's Support Worker encouraged him to stay, which he did, and he spent the rest of the afternoon talking to the staff and members. From this moment, Joe has returned to visit Roots weekly, attending projects and activities on different days. He has not had a mental health relapse or taken substances since he has been attending.

Joe's main reason for coming back repeatedly is for the people. He said that the projects get him out of the house and give him something to do, but he has also built many new friendships with staff and members who have been there for him when he needed it. Joe explained that Roots have improved his life immeasurably. It has not only meant he leaves his house daily but also goes on holidays, attends appointments alone, and has since passed his driving test. All of these have been truly transformational and have given him a better quality of life.

Joe has also learnt many new skills, including mental health first aid, gardening, and DIY. Joe is now a long-serving member of Roots and is heavily involved in all the projects and activities, enabling him to be an active community member and manage his mental health. Joe gets a tremendous amount of enjoyment from helping new attendees. He is among the first to welcome people into the project, knowing how apprehensive the first day can be. Joe explained that making people feel welcome is essential, and he loves watching others improve throughout their time with Roots.

"Roots is a wonderful place, and I feel blessed to be able to come here. People don't judge, which I am grateful for. I love the people at Roots."

Case Study

Colin, Roots Member since 2023

Colin moved to the UK in the 1960s and has lived, worked and raised his family here ever since. However, four years ago, a few years after his retirement, Colin experienced a relationship breakdown with his family still residing in his country of birth, which resulted in a severe decline in his mental health. Colin became suicidal and was admitted to an inpatient psychiatric unit at Luton Hospital.

Once Colin was discharged, he returned home to live with his family. His home life was difficult, and he had many challenges in the relationships between his family members. This left Colin feeling very socially isolated.

In 2023, Colin was introduced to Roots during a hospital appointment, and he first visited the Roots 2 Recovery Garden. During his first visit, he was welcomed by the team and members. He did some gardening, had some lunch, and then took a walk around the woods, which he really enjoyed.

Colin now attends Connects weekly and the Roots 2 Recovery Garden during the warmer months. He explained that the weekly activities get him out of the house and away from life stresses. He now feels happier as it gives him something to look forward to each week.

Colin said he has lived in the UK for a very long time but had never really spoken to anyone. Attending Roots was the first time he had made friends.

“I have enjoyed meeting people and being part of a community. I find I am finally living here.”

At Christmas, Colin contacted his past employer to tell them about Roots and how he was supported. As a result, they made a £200 donation to the service. Colin said he has always tried to help people, and it felt good to give back to a service that has supported him.

Since attending Roots, Colin has become less socially isolated and has significantly improved his mental health and wellbeing.





Case Study

Paul, previous Roots member who has since moved away from Luton and started a new life. The following was written by Paul's partner.

"Paul is doing really well in his new home and life. He has come a long way, and his time at Roots was a huge confidence booster. It helped him reconnect with people, make new friends, and even reunite with old ones from his younger days.

Being part of the Roots garden team—working with tools, sheds, and a regular routine—benefited both of us greatly. It gave him the chance to reengage with the community, develop social skills, and make meaningful connections.

Though Paul still fondly remembers his friends from Roots, he's so content with his new routine that he rarely commits to visiting. Before Roots, he had been quite isolated due to funding cuts and day centre closures. He interacted mostly with staff and housemates, which caused me a lot of anxiety. When I found Roots, I was so relieved I cried. It was the perfect place—kind, non-judgmental, and accepting.

Roots made a huge impact on Paul's confidence, giving him the space to be himself and pursue what he loves. It was the catalyst that lifted him out of isolation. Without Roots, I doubt he would be where he is today, socially or emotionally.

I have nothing but gratitude for Sam and her team. We formed beautiful friendships, and I know if we hadn't moved away, we'd still be attending. I only wish Roots didn't have to constantly worry about funding, as its positive impact on society is undeniable.

Long may Roots continue in their mission to accept, help, care, guide and support vulnerable adults.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you all from the bottom of my heart for all you done for Paul and I - words are not enough!"

Mental & Physical Health

Our Work

Offering a therapeutic growing space and range of non-clinical support services designed to boost mental wellbeing and physical health

Providing opportunities for physical activity through gardening, walking, and other outdoor pursuits in a natural environment

Enabling members to establish a positive weekly routine and structure, which is beneficial for mental health

Delivering a variety of workshops and activities that support mental wellbeing, such as arts and crafts, discussions, and mindfulness

Preventing mental health relapses and hospital admissions by offering consistent, long-term support and a place to turn in times of need

Aims & Background

Out of hospital care

Clinical reliance

NHS Costs

Mental and physical ill-health place a significant burden on the NHS, with the cost of mental ill-health alone estimated at **£105.2 billion annually** in England. (1)

The majority of people first attend Roots while struggling with **mental ill-health or chronic physical conditions**.

Green space access

Risk factors

Social Determinants

The Denny Review, examining health inequalities in Bedfordshire, Luton, and Milton Keynes, highlights the impact of social determinants like **limited green space access** on health outcomes. (2)

In Luton it has been estimated that **5.8% of deaths in adults over 30** are due to poor air quality. (3)

Outcomes

Mental Health



94%

In our latest members' survey, **94% reported an improvement in their mental health and wellbeing** since attending Roots.

Physical Health



78%

In our latest members' survey, **78% reported an improvement in their physical health and fitness** since attending Roots.

References: (1) The Economic and Social Cost of Mental Ill-health, Centre for Mental Health, 2022; (2 and 3) The Denny Review, A Review of Health Inequalities in Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes, 2023



Case Study

TJ, Roots Member since 2022, staff member since 2024

"For as long as I can remember, I've felt like an outsider in my own life, searching for a place where I could truly belong. Our society is structured in a way that puts immense pressure on all of us to achieve, succeed, and reach high targets, leaving little room for simply existing.

I grew up in Portsmouth and then moved away from friends to university at Bournemouth, and then moved away again to Luton for my research degree. I've never had a place which has felt like home. I often found myself buried under anxiety and struggling with self-worth as I desperately tried to attain a good degree and a high-paying job. This quest for success consumed me, leaving no room for personal connections or self-exploration. A monotonous office job further distanced me from people and from nature, something longed for time to experience more of.

But then, by almost complete accident, I was directed towards Penrose Roots, a sanctuary among the soil.

Everyone treated me as a friend from my first cup of tea here. It's a place where everyone genuinely wants to be, and the warmth and compassion radiating within the group are palpable. I was encouraged to participate in activities we don't get encouraged to try daily: gardening, arts, crafts, baking, etc. These activities allowed me to explore different facets of myself. I quickly discovered that there was so much more to me than just my job and academic achievements.

At Penrose Roots, I found a place where every achievement is celebrated and appreciated. I no longer need to measure my worth solely through professional or academic successes. Instead, I've discovered that my contributions, however small they may be, are valued by my friends and staff here (though they are one and the same). I have truly found a sense of belonging and acceptance. The love and support I've received here have allowed me to grow into a more grounded, confident, and authentic version of myself.

As I continue to nurture these passions and connections, I am grateful for having discovered this oasis in a world that can often feel cold and unforgiving. Had it not been for Penrose Roots, I might have never overcome my mental health crisis last year, gathered the strength to regain control of my life, and successfully completed my university degree to embark on this new chapter of my life.

**In the end, finding Penrose Roots has helped me find serenity and myself.
And for that, I am forever grateful."**

ITV Anglia visited the Roots to Recovery Garden on Tuesday, April 9th, 2024, for the Green Social Prescribing Event.

[Click to watch the video of their full report, which includes an interview with Roots member TJ.](#)



"An excellent report demonstrating your invaluable work broadcast on Anglia News this evening - a special way to pass on the wonderful message of your essential contribution to so many people, and particularly young people, when they are at a really low and difficult time in their lives."

Robert Oakley, Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire

Case Study

Holly, Roots Member since 2021

Back in 2021, Holly was spending a lot of time at home and struggling with her mental health. Her diagnoses include anxiety, depression, schizophrenia and bipolar, which have unfortunately led to her being sectioned four times in the last ten years.

After being discharged from the hospital for the fourth time, Holly occasionally attended local arts and crafts activity groups run by mental health providers. However, Holly stopped attending because she found the sessions too formal and was often criticised for being late. After she stopped attending these sessions, Holly became even more socially isolated. At this point, a friend suggested that Holly attend Roots Connects, our social group held on a Friday in a church hall.

Accompanied by her friend, Holly attended one of the meetings. Holly recounted her first day and said she felt welcomed by the Roots staff and members. There was a relaxed atmosphere that was different from some of the groups she had previously attended. Since that day, she has attended Roots Connects almost weekly for the last three years.

Holly said attending the group has hugely improved her physical and mental wellbeing. She has grown in confidence and self-esteem through the activities and interactions with others. She explained that she often has good and bad days but always leaves Roots Connects feeling positive and happy if she feels low. It is something she looks forward to each week.

Holly needed housing support, so the Roots team referred her to Synergy, another of Penrose's services that provides 1:1 support, including tenancy and accommodation advice. Synergy was able to secure Holly temporary accommodation in the first instance. More recently, they have been able to help Holly get permanent accommodation, which she moved into in October 2023. Secure accommodation has massively boosted Holly's self-esteem, and she recalled how much she has enjoyed transforming the property into her own home.

In addition to being supported into permanent accommodation, Roots also referred Holly to the Therapy Project, which is a project funded by East London NHS Foundation Trust, where Penrose partnered with The Counselling Foundation to provide trauma and psychologically informed therapists and counselling specialists for free to people with the highest needs in our care and supported accommodation. Holly was provided with 12 sessions, and the positive impact on her mental health was so significant that she turned down the last two sessions, as she felt that she no longer needed them.

Holly has felt judged in her life because of her mental health but is grateful to have the community at Roots where she feels accepted. Holly's mental health has remained stable since becoming a member of Roots, and her attendance is now a crucial part of how she manages her mental health. Holly now lives a happy and healthy life with her new support network and home.

“Roots is a really friendly, fun and welcoming place. It is somewhere to make friends and boost your confidence. I always leave feeling positive.”

Neurodiversity

Our Work

Offering flexibility in attendance and participation, allowing neurodiverse members to engage in activities and social interactions at their own pace

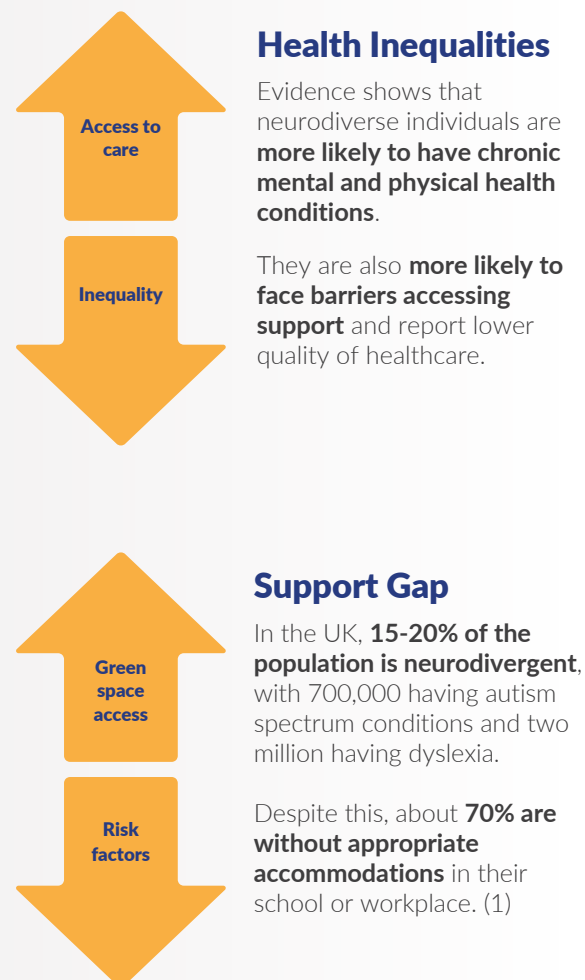
Adopting a person-centred approach, recognising that each individual has different experiences, challenges and support needs, rather than a one-size-fits-all model

Enabling neurodiverse members to pursue their interests and develop skills in areas such as horticulture, crafts, and cooking

Supporting members' sensory needs by providing a calming, natural environment and accommodating individual preferences (e.g., avoiding loud noises for a member sensitive to them)

Fostering social connections and friendships among neurodiverse members and neurotypical peers in a welcoming, safe space

Aims & Background



Health Inequalities

Evidence shows that neurodiverse individuals are **more likely to have chronic mental and physical health conditions**.

They are also **more likely to face barriers accessing support** and report lower quality of healthcare.

Support Gap

In the UK, **15-20% of the population is neurodivergent**, with 700,000 having autism spectrum conditions and two million having dyslexia.

Despite this, about **70% are without appropriate accommodations** in their school or workplace. (1)

Outcomes

Openness and Inclusion



100%

Every Roots member is **informed they can request accommodations** for their specific neurodiversity needs.

Meeting Diverse Needs



100%

Every **neurodiverse Roots member has had their needs met** without any reported difficulties in requesting accommodations.

References: (1) ICAEW Insights: Neurodiversity: the power of thinking differently, 2023



Case Study

In recognition of Neurodiversity Celebration Week, Lynne (Project Officer at Roots) shared her experience working with two neurodiverse Roots members and supporting them on their journey.

Josh, Roots Member since 2018

"Josh was the first member I ever worked with when I started volunteering for Roots in 2021. We both remember that we planted radish seeds together! Josh started at Roots in 2018 and was introduced through his support worker. At the time, Josh was living with his parents but a place in supported living became available for him in 2021- it took just over a year of day visits and weekend stays before Josh moved in permanently where he now lives happily. This was a huge achievement for him and I mention this because I have learned that with Josh he likes to take his time to feel comfortable in a situation. He hates loud noises and spiders - two things I help him avoid at the garden! He is friendly with everyone but isn't great at remembering names, he copes by calling everyone 'Buddy'. He loves finding the funny and quirky in a situation, especially naming everything he makes or harvests! Josh attends the Roots 2 Recovery Garden once a week and we are part of his weekly routine of activities."

Ryan, Roots Member since 2023

"Ryan joined Roots in November 2023. At just 19, he is one of our younger members. From the start we knew that Ryan was already studying horticulture at a local college and he wanted to enhance his experience by joining the Roots 2 Recovery Garden. He attends the garden weekly and also comes whenever college is closed. Ryan is always keen to join in any activity, he is just as enthusiastic about gardening tasks as he is crafts. I have learned that he is very particular about things, likes direct instructions and is willing to try anything new. He has a great sense of humour and holds his own on pretty much any topic! Ryan is now using his time at Roots to Recovery as work experience for his college course. We are proud to support him on his horticultural journey."

Education, Training & Employment

Our Work

Providing a range of skill-building workshops and training opportunities in areas such as horticulture, crafts, cooking, soft skills, and practical DIY

Offering hands-on work experience through volunteering and participation in Roots' various projects and social enterprises, such as the plant nursery and bike workshop

Partnering with training providers, such as Bedfordshire and Luton Recovery College, to offer member's pathways into structured educational courses and vocational qualifications

Offering tailored support and encouragement to help members identify and work towards their individual learning and employment goals

Celebrating members' achievements in learning and employment, and sharing success stories to inspire others and challenge stigma around mental health and disability in the workplace

Aims & Background

Employable skills

Inequality

Unemployment

The unemployment rate in Luton for people aged 16 and over **increased to 5.2% in 2023**.

This is **higher than the average** of 3.7% for the UK. (1)

Individual job support

Hiring inequality

Employment Barriers

Disadvantaged groups, such as those with physical or learning disabilities, and/or experiences of homelessness, and the criminal justice system, **encounter significant barriers to employment**.

Addressing this issue is a key focus of the **Luton Council Employment & Skills Strategy 2022-2027**.

Outcomes

Growth from Within



75%

Of the current Roots staff, 75% were employed from **previously being service members and volunteers**.

Continuing Pathways



92%

In our latest member survey, **92% of members reported to have learnt new skills** since attending Roots.

References: (1) Based on Office of National Statistics Data, 2023

Case Study

Joanne, Roots Member since 2023

In late August 2023, Joanne's Mental Health Support Worker brought her to Roots for a site tour. After a mental health crisis and a brief hospital stay four years earlier, Joanne had been unemployed and socially isolated. The Support Worker hoped that joining Roots would help Joanne reconnect with the community and improve her health and wellbeing.

Joanne was nervous at first but surprised the team by showing up early for the project the following week. She initially struggled with social interaction and felt uncomfortable getting dirty. We began her training by having her water the site, a task she enjoyed. She also liked harvesting produce and was thrilled to take some home, which sparked conversations about cooking and her improved eating habits.

Despite the winter weather, Joanne committed to attending twice a week, and after getting the right gear, she became more comfortable with gardening. Before winter, we cleared the beds, and Joanne participated in composting workshops and helped build our first no-dig bed, a project aimed at improving soil health.

When invited to the Roots Christmas Party, Joanne felt anxious but agreed to go after support from the team. She later shared that she enjoyed the event and was inspired by her progress, which led her to join a local gym. By the new year, Joanne had been helping with hard landscaping tasks, maintaining garden tools, and attending workshops on mental health and well-being, to which she had actively contributed.

Joanne helped plant potatoes, onions, and garlic in the spring and learned new gardening skills. Over the summer, she joined a group trip, started a part-time cleaning job, and continued going to the gym, improving her physical health.

Joanne's progress has been remarkable. She is healthier, more confident, and has a positive outlook. We plan to support her in joining our Volunteer Pathway or exploring peer mentoring. We've also encouraged her to set new personal goals, including enrolling in a course at Bedford College.

Here are some of the Roots workshops and training courses:



Criminal Justice

Our Work

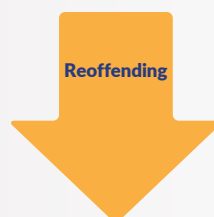
Offering targeted programmes, such as the Recycle-A-Bike workshop, that engage young people and adults who have been involved with the criminal justice system

Partnering with Probation Services and Youth Offending teams to offer community-based support and interventions that promote rehabilitation and reduce reoffending

Addressing underlying factors that may contribute to offending behaviour, such as mental ill-health, substance use, and lack of employment, through a holistic approach that combines practical support with wellbeing interventions

Supporting individuals to rebuild their lives and reintegrate into the community following release from prison or completion of a sentence, through ongoing support and aftercare

Aims & Background



Reoffending

Luton's **reoffending rates are higher than the regional average**, with youth reoffending at 32.6%. (1)

The Justice and Home Affairs Committee finds that reoffending reduces when **Probation and local support agencies like Penrose partner on community sentences**.



Social Value

In 2021/22, the average **annual cost per prisoner was £48,774**, while a medium-level secure NHS service annually costs £250,755 per unit. (2)

The project's ROI is based on estimated social value, including **reducing UK criminal justice and healthcare costs**.

Outcomes

Recycle-A-Bike



137

Through the **Recycle-A-Bike programme in collaboration with the Youth Offending Service**, 137 bikes have been repaired and donated free to the community since 2022.

Probation Support



100%

Our recent statistics show that **100% of members** who have histories of the Criminal Justice System **have not reoffended** since attending Roots.

References: (1) Based on Office of National Statistics Data, 2023 (2) Ministry of Justice Annual Report 21/22

Case Study

Luke, Roots Member since 2014

Luke started his journey as a resident at one of Penrose's Bedfordshire-based accommodation services before being referred to Roots. He had spent most of his adult life in and out of prison and had 39 convictions before he first attended Roots.

During his time with us, he got involved in a situation that landed him in court on charges. We supported him through court and offered a character reference stating how he had been coming to the garden and was slowly making steps to turn his life around and change his peer group to have a more positive future. The court issued a fine, but luckily, not time in prison.

Two years later, he found himself back in court, this time on quite a serious charge that could see him spend the next five years in prison. Once again, Roots provided a character reference to vouch for his character and his progress since attending the projects. He was given a second chance, although this time, it came with a curfew, lengthy probation and rehabilitation.

Luke, for the first time, complied with his order, completed his probation, and stopped using substances after 35 years of self-medicating. His substance use was often a factor in his past behaviours. Luke has not re-offended for the last three years or relapsed with his substance use. He is working for the first time in his late 40s, all because Roots was a constant in his life and supported him through difficult times.





Letter from Youth Offending Service

Dear Penrose Roots Team,

I hope this email finds you well. I am writing to express our deepest gratitude for the incredible support and partnership that Penrose Roots has extended to our organization. The recent training workshops facilitated by your team in Stockwood Park, under the guidance of William, have left an indelible mark on our young people and our community as a whole.

The workshops, focused on fixing and reconditioning bikes, have been nothing short of transformative for the young individuals involved. William's expertise, patience, and genuine passion for his craft shone through in every session. His ability to engage and empower the young offenders, guiding them through the intricacies of bike repair, was truly remarkable to witness. Not only did he impart valuable technical skills, but he also served as a mentor and role model, instilling confidence and a sense of purpose in each participant.

The impact of these workshops extends far beyond the confines of the training room. Through their dedicated efforts, the young people not only fulfilled their reparation hours but also made meaningful contributions to society. The bikes they fixed and reconditioned were not merely objects; they represented second chances, opportunities for positive change, and acts of generosity toward the community. It is a testament to the power of collaboration and the potential for individuals to thrive when given the right support and guidance.

This partnership between our organizations has been nothing short of amazing. The synergy between our missions and values has resulted in tangible benefits for all involved, from the young offenders finding purpose and direction to the broader community benefiting from their contributions. We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to work alongside Penrose Roots and hoping to continue this journey of empowerment and positive impact together.

Once again, thank you for your unwavering commitment to making a difference in the lives of young people and communities. Your support has been invaluable, and we are truly privileged to be a part of such a meaningful partnership.

Kind regards,
Maria Cojocar
Youth Justice Assistant
Luton Partnership Service

Sustainability & Environment

Our Work

Maintaining and enhancing biodiversity by creating and preserving habitats for wildlife within the Roots gardens and surrounding green spaces

Promoting waste reduction and circular economy through zero-waste projects such as Recycle-A-Bike, which refurbishes old bikes for reuse, and by using recycled/donated materials in craft activities

Offering hands-on environmental education and sustainable practice through workshops, activities, and involvement in eco-friendly projects

Reducing Roots' own carbon footprint by utilising energy-saving measures, minimising waste, and promoting sustainable transport options for staff and members

Partnering with local authorities, environmental organisations, and community groups to support wider green initiatives and engage members in local conservation efforts

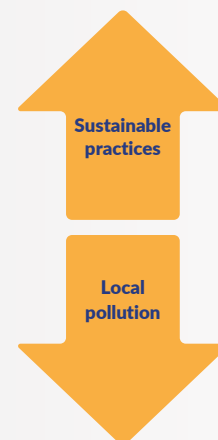
Aims & Background



Urban Green Spaces

The **benefits of green spaces** on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of urban residents is well documented.

Green spaces support mental health by providing a sense of **self, escape, and connection with the world.**



Climate Action

Luton's Climate Policy and Action Plan aims to increase biodiversity, green space, sustainability education, and community engagement.

Roots contributes by maintaining public green space, offering experiential learning, and engaging residents in sustainable practices.

Outcomes

Conservation



2,733

Roots volunteers have contributed **2,733 hours of conservation work** on-site and in the local area since 2021.

Community Gardens



8

Since 2021, Roots have supported Edible Hightown and Luton Borough Council in their mission to transform spare green spaces by **building 8 pocket gardens and raised beds in the community.**

Here are some of the Roots sustainability and environmental activities:



Food Support

Our Work

Growing fresh, organic produce on-site which is distributed to members to take home and share, improving access to healthy food

Providing opportunities for members to learn about healthy eating, growing produce, and food budgeting through practical activities

Distributing surplus produce grown at Roots to Recovery Garden to local community organisations and food banks, helping to address food poverty in the wider community

Involving members in decisions about what to grow and how to distribute produce, giving them a sense of ownership over their food supply

Partnering with local food poverty alliances and networks to advocate for food justice and support coordinated responses to food insecurity

Aims & Background



Food Poverty

Luton, one of the UK's top 10 most destitute areas, has 8.9% of households living in destitution, **with 60% lacking sufficient food. (1)**

With **food insecurity increased by 201%** since 2021, this need is only likely to increase further.

Diet and Nutrition

Luton adults consume an average of 2.4 portions of fruit and vegetables daily, with **only 46.5% eating the recommended 5-a-day**, lower than the national average.

Poor diet contributes to 50% of coronary heart disease and 30% of cancer deaths, **the leading causes of death in Luton. (2)**

Outcomes

Food Production



1.6+ tonnes

Since 2021, there has been 1.6+ tonnes of fresh produce grown at the Roots to Recovery Garden by members, equivalent to about **21,250 portions of fruits and vegetables.**

Community Donations



84%

After being used at Roots and taken home by members, the remaining 84% of unused produce is then **donated to local community food hubs.**

References: (1) Based on Office of National Statistics Data, (2) Luton Food Plan 2018-22

Here are some of the food and produce grown locally at Roots:



Feedback: What does Roots do well?

In January 2024, we hosted a Roots Away Day, where Roots members, volunteers, and staff were invited to participate in a roundtable deep-dive into the service so we could better understand what Roots does well and what we could improve on. We received the following feedback on what people thought Roots did well:

"Penrose believes in us."

Roots provides structure and a reason to get up, eat regularly and function normally.

Members trust Penrose, where they do not other support agencies and groups.

The staff team are more patient than others. Penrose work differently from other agencies, which often have an "us" and "them" mentality.

Members like learning about and enjoying gardening, nature, and the environment.

Reduces anxiety and isolation. Often the only times they get to speak to other people socially.

Members find value in the courses and programmes to help them to get work and training.

Flexible attendance is a positive, there is no mandatory requirement to attend every session.

Resourceful – recycling items, selling produce, and providing food parcels to those in need.

Encouraging people and building confidence.

Gain social friendships from Roots which provides members further support outside Penrose.

There is no divide between the members and Penrose staff – members trust and believe in the service and each other.

Opportunities are created to listen to people who may not be doing well.

Celebrates achievements even when small. It makes them feel valued and worth something, building belief in themselves, often for the first time in their life or following trauma.

"Penrose brings back hope."

Mental health support.

Building relationships and allowing friendships to blossom in a safe space. Staff initiating and supporting this process.

Community-based and non-clinical support.



The Roots team offers subtle encouragement and support, which helps develop confidence and individual potential.

Has a good reputation and is well thought of locally.

Each week, there is a different theme and a variety of activities.

Trust that Roots will respond to a crisis sensitively.

Respecting people's issues whilst creating a space for people to have time away from their problems.

Acceptance, diversity, and inclusivity.

Feedback from Members

The below is pseudonymised feedback gathered from members through nominations, feedback forms, and letters.

"Keep up the good work; I do not know who I would be without Roots. Roots is a brilliant charity; since I joined them, I always felt welcomed even when I wasn't myself."

Carl, member since 2020

"I wish Roots could exist without worrying about continually finding funding. I have witnessed Roots's positive contributions to society and the people it works with."

The results are life-changing for everyone who has been a member. Long may Penrose Roots continue to accept, help, care for, guide, and support marginalised adults."

Family of Oliver, member since 2021

"The staff here are very friendly, inviting, respectful, and also very supportive. Roots is a friendly environment and a great chance to meet new people. Overall, I love to come here."

Miriam, member since 2023

"Penrose Roots is my family, my home away from home, and a more loving community than I ever imagined for myself."

Theo, member since 2022

"They never shut the door to anyone, and even if you have an episode, they are always checking in on your well-being to see if you have enough support or if they can assist with any additional support."

Also, they encourage you, allow you to be who you are, support you, and are open to anything you believe in without judgment."

Sharon, member since 2019, volunteer since 2021

"I have nothing but praise for the Penrose Roots project and the team. Luton needs a project like Roots, especially during these difficult times when so many people are losing their employment and need help,"

I could not imagine a Luton without Roots!"

Richard, member since 2021



This word cloud was formed using the feedback collected from members, volunteers and staff during the Roots Away Day in January 2024.

Recent Awards and Accolades



"It's great to see how the community garden project has developed!"
Rachel Hopkins MP, Luton North



The High Sheriff of Bedfordshire's award "in recognition of great and valuable services to the community", 2023



Roots' Service Manager Samantha Smith was invited to the Buckingham Palace Garden Party in Spring 2023, recognised by King Charles for her positive community impact.



Charity of the Year
Luton and Bedfordshire Community Awards 2023



"It was such an honour to meet many of the volunteers & to see the wonderful vegetables they grow"
HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire Susan Lousada



Utilita Environment Achievement of the Year
Luton's Best Awards 2024

Feedback from Partner Agencies

"I just wanted to say a massive thank you to you both for enabling my client to come down to your gardens. She is currently there and when I was speaking with her, she shared with me that she felt really emotional as she feels she has found her place. Thank you once again, the work that you do is incredible."

Katie Harris, Employment Advisor - Total Wellbeing Luton

"As always a real pleasure to come and visit your site and see all the great work going on. I always notice how all the staff and people attending at the gardens seem so happy and to get so much out of their engagement there. You are doing such great work so keep on keeping on with it."

Lisa Heaton, Higher Officer - Natural England

"I certainly enjoyed my two visits there, one soon after I started in this role, the other at your Open Day. I have still got the bee hotel, from one of the interactive activities, in a prominent position at home! How amazing to be so near to a main road and yet while on the site to feel like you are a world away."

Nicholas Bray, Project Support Officer - Luton Supporting You



Support SIG Penrose Roots

Our work relies on generous support from people like you. Without your contributions, we simply couldn't provide our essential services to hundreds of people in Luton and Bedfordshire each year.

How You Can Help



Make a Donation Today

Every contribution helps us support our members, run wellbeing workshops, and maintain our sites.

socialinterestgroup.enthuse.com/roots



Volunteer Your Time

Share your skills and experience with our members while becoming part of our supportive community.

samantha.smith@socialinterestgroup.org.uk



Become a Corporate Partner

Your organisation can make a meaningful difference through sponsorship, payroll donations, or in-kind support.

fundraising@socialinterestgroup.org.uk

We need your support more than ever to ensure that SIG Penrose Roots continues to be a place where people find the support, skills, and community they need to thrive.

Support now and help us grow recovery, wellbeing, and community.

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Charity no. 1151455 | Company no. 8466743

Penrose is part of Social Interest Group. We believe good care and support improve lives. Our mission is to empower people who are marginalised by building powerful partnerships and creative solutions that bridge gaps in provision and aid recovery, reablement and resettlement.



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