

Innovative Research Solutions with Industry

Healthcare

CLIENT:
James Connolly Hospital

AREA:
Innovation in Healthcare



An innovative partnership to improve patient care



Connolly Hospital (CHB) is a major teaching hospital providing a range of services to a population of 290,000. The Hospital's catchment area extends into West Dublin, Meath & Kildare.

As per its mission statement the hospital is committed to the provision of patient centred quality care delivered with compassion and professionalism by valued and dedicated staff whilst ensuring excellence, equity and accountability.

The hospital was redesigned in 2000 and now incorporates a number of internal courtyards. The function of these courtyards is to provide passive enjoyment to patients, staff and visitors to the hospital. The landscape schemes implemented at that time were poorly considered, lacking in visual interest and difficult to maintain. Hospital resources have been severely reduced in recent years, resulting in a drop in ground maintenance staff, and they lacked the horticultural expertise to maintain the courtyards in a sustainable way.

Having access to restful areas in the courtyards was identified by the hospital as an important resource for the emotional and physical wellbeing of patients and their families. An analysis and an intervention by qualified horticulturists was identified as being required to improve the visual qualities while sustaining planting schemes via low maintenance regimes. Having had discussions in 2012 with management at the hospital regarding the benefits of horticultural therapy within a



ITB Horticultural students during the renovation.

healthcare context, a relationship developed between ITB and the hospital management which led to this project. The hospital needed qualified, experienced horticulturists to analyse several sites and design a new landscape scheme that would provide visual interest and scope for passive and active enjoyment of the gardens with minimum maintenance requirements. ITB had experienced horticulture lecturers with an enthusiast core of students interested in participating in community collaborations on a voluntary basis.

In 2012 a small internal courtyard adjacent to an internal corridor of the main hospital was renovated, redesigned and replanted. This area was highly visible but completely enclosed on four sides, overlooked by a busy café, an intensive ➔

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•> care unit and several secondary corridors. A larger courtyard was identified as a suitable location for a family room and area to assist social care practitioners in supporting families at a time when a relative was seriously ill or dying. Students researched therapeutic gardens, appropriate planting types, worked with prominent nursery proprietors to source appropriate plant material and identified features which would allow the security, privacy and comfort required in such a crisis. When completed, this space will include seating, screens and a play area for children.

To support the project, Connolly Hospital received a grant of €8,500 from the Irish Hospice under the Design and Dignity grant scheme. In-kind support was also given by hospital staff from the estates, social care, environmental and nursing functions. ITB provided time and expertise as in-kind support to the hospital from both the academic staff and student body.

Two courtyard areas have been transformed within the hospital which have added to the care and support which patients and their families

experience during crisis times. The hospital is committed to incorporating hospice principles into the wider medical practice and improvements of the gardens are part of this mission.

The project also built relationships between ITB horticulture and the local community. Through this initiative the students engaged in delivery of a full horticultural service from conception to implementation that offered hands-on experience of meeting the very specific needs of clients. Students also learned about palliative care and hospice principles and collaborated with an architect on design and material choice.

The project has enhanced the environment of the hospital itself and opens doors for further such projects within healthcare and education and also with regard to community development. This is a good basis to pursue further community collaborations between ITB horticultural staff and students and the local community. Discussions are now ongoing with Fingal County Council and Blanchardstown Area Partnership on the development of food gardens in public community areas. ■

TESTIMONIAL

Bernadette O'Sullivan
James Connolly Hospital

"Connolly hospital had the privilege of working with staff and students from the ITB on a joint project which transformed an overgrown courtyard into a therapeutic garden and space for patients and their families. It provides an environment into which patients can escape from the clinical environment to a calm area surrounded by nature. The enthusiasm and wealth of knowledge of both staff and students was very evident and much appreciated"



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