

Green Mindfulness: A Novel Approach to Student Wellness



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Research Exchange Group – Horticultural Therapy

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PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- **Brief description and rationale for Green Mindfulness**
- **Description of the Botanical Gardens and SWCC**
- **Description of Horticultural Therapy and Mindfulness**
- **Development of Green Mindfulness**
- **Participants**
- **How it works (set-up, activities)**
- **Feedback Survey & Results**
- **Discussion of Importance**
- **Limitations and Ideas for the Future**

GREEN MINDFULNESS

- **Joining of Botanical Gardens and Student Wellness and Counselling Centre to help increase student wellness on campus**
- **Uses gardening/plants to create a space for students to come socialize, meet people, and develop introductory mindfulness skills**
- **Goals:**
 - Have students be present in the moment with the help of a plant based activity
 - Provide wellness activity to students who do not know about SWCC or are apprehensive about counselling

MUN BOTANICAL GARDENS

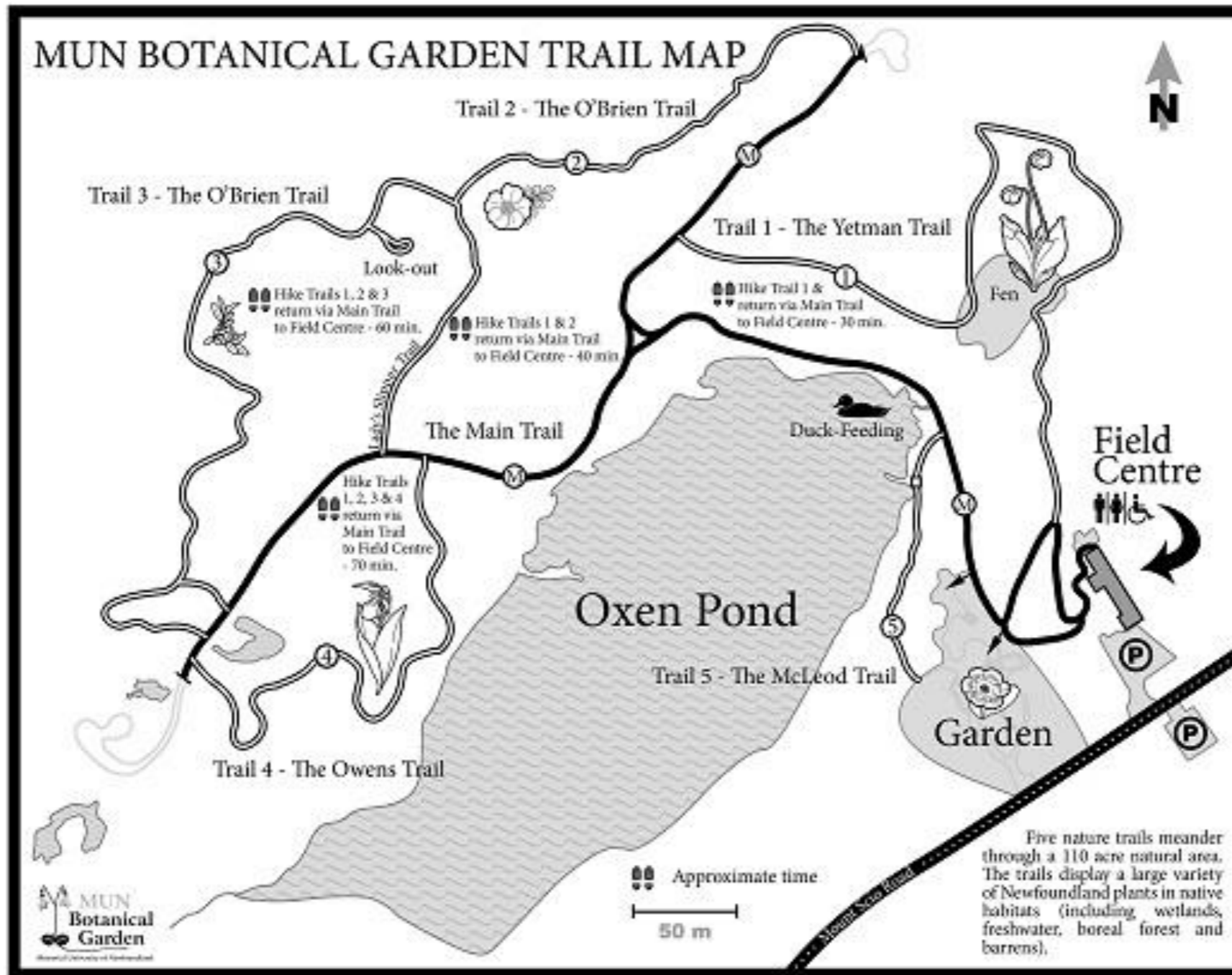


MUN BOTANICAL GARDEN

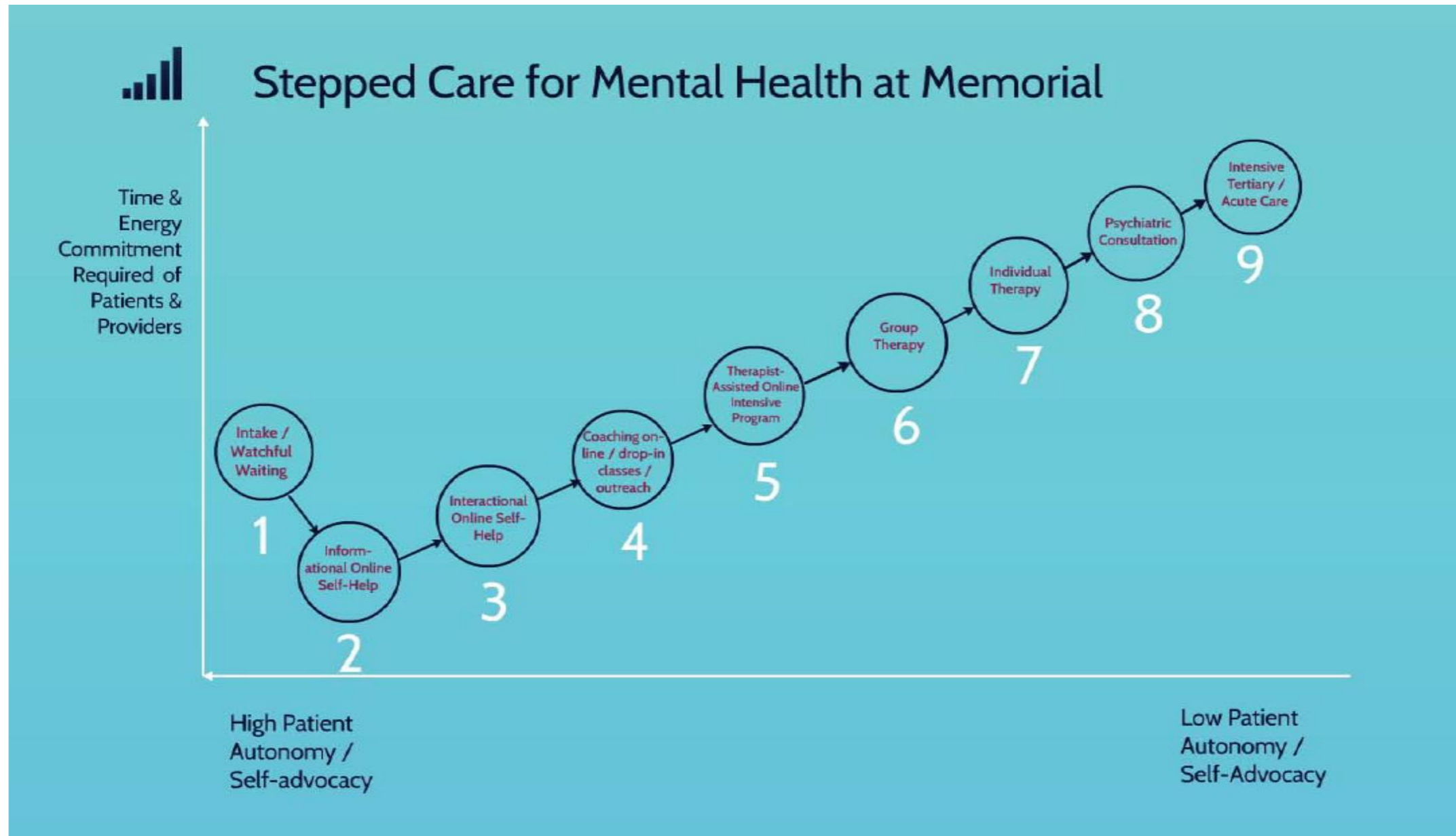
The Garden has been developed to display plants native to the province and cultivated plants suitable to the local climate and to provide access to a number of habitats through a system of trails. Originally named Oxen Pond Botanic Park, it was initiated in 1971, under the supervision of Bernard S. Jackson. It was opened to the public in July, 1977

Located at 306 Mount Scio Road, St. John's, our 45 ha includes extensive nature trails, a fresh water pond and of course our wonderful gardens.

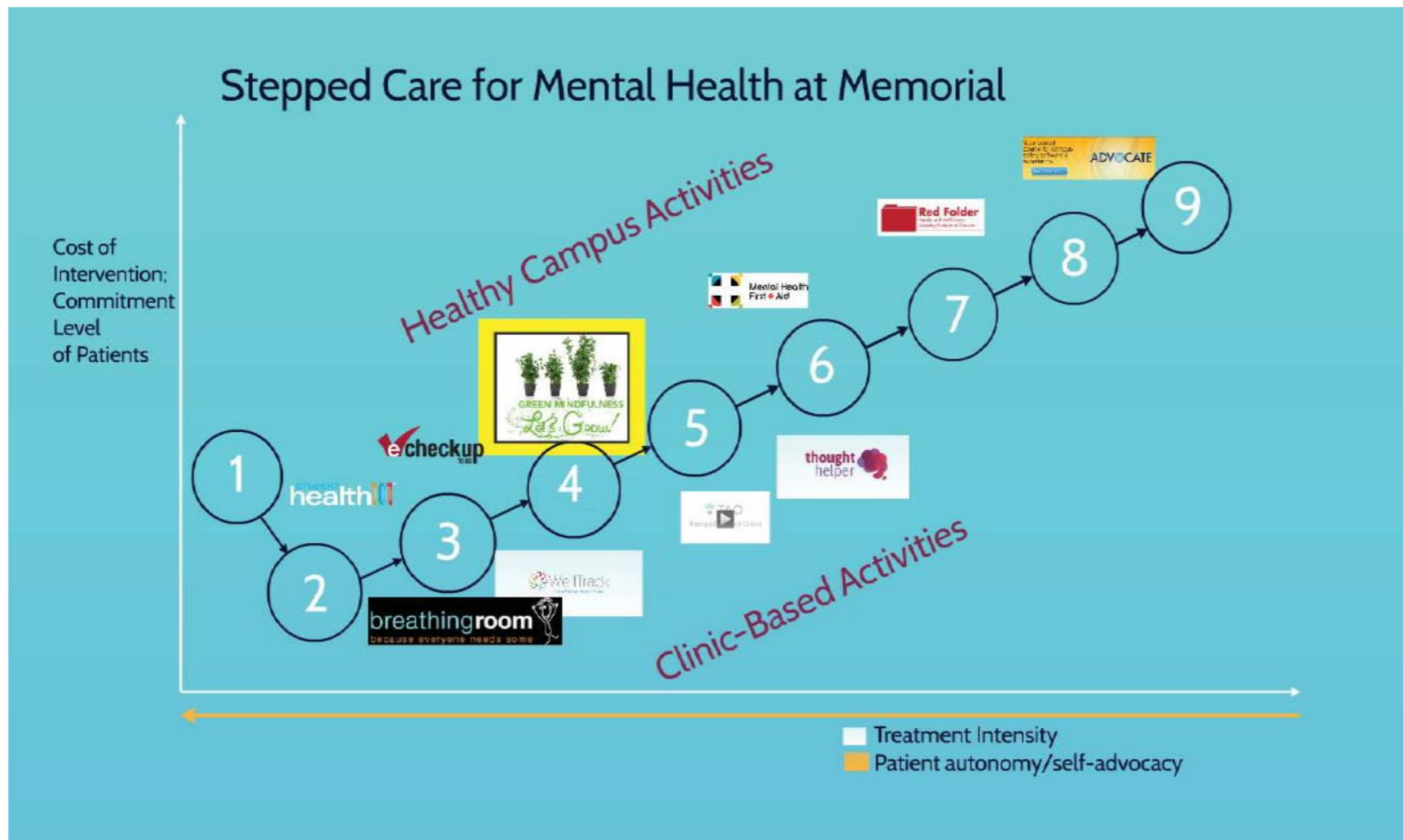
MUN BOTANICAL GARDEN



STUDENT WELLNESS & COUNSELLING CENTRE



STUDENT WELLNESS & COUNSELLING CENTRE



COMBINING SKILL SETS

- **Norman and the Botanical Gardens**
 - Plant knowledge
 - Horticultural therapy
- **Heather and the Student Wellness and Counselling Centre**
 - Counselling, group therapy facilitation
 - Mindfulness

HORTICULTURAL THERAPY

Horticultural Therapy (HT) is a formal practice that uses plants, horticultural activities, and the garden landscape to promote well-being for its participants. HT is goal oriented with defined outcomes and assessment procedures. HT sessions are administered by professionally trained Horticultural Therapists. Research indicates that HT is proven to be beneficial in a wide variety of healthcare, residential, school, and rehabilitative settings.

CHTA - www.chta.ca

HORTICULTURAL THERAPY

Therapeutic Horticulture (TH) is the purposeful use of plants and plant-related activities to promote health and wellness for an individual or group. A TH program leader is trained to use horticulture to promote well-being but goals and outcomes for individual participants are not clinically documented.

- Both HT and TH recognize the positive benefits of the interaction between people and plants and gardens to improve cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.

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HORTICULTURAL THERAPY THEORY

Therapeutic benefits of horticulture are based on three factors:

- **Reaction:** The intrinsic benefits of being around plants
- **Interaction:** The opportunity that plants offer for non-threatening interaction with others
- **Action:** The benefits of growing and nurturing plants

HORTICULTURAL THERAPY THEORY

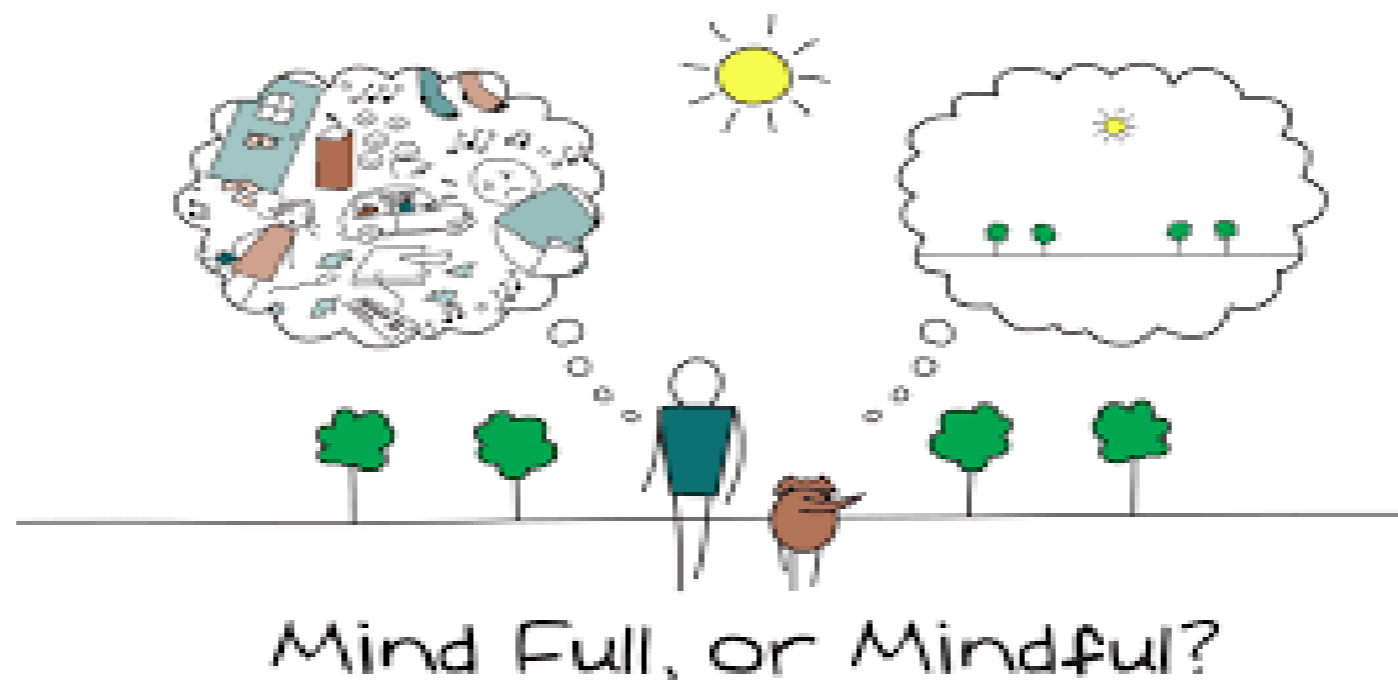
Being in nature and gardening, or working with plants generally, is a normal everyday activity

Therefore:

- Attractive
- Non-threatening
- Culturally acceptable

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is about being fully aware of whatever is happening, in the present moment, without filters or the lens of judgment. It can be brought to any situation. Put simply, mindfulness consists of cultivating awareness of the mind and body and living in the here and now.



GREEN MINDFULNESS



PARTICIPANTS

- **Open to all Memorial students, staff, alumni**
- **Average 30 students per group**
- **Recruitment through:**
 - posters
 - screens on campus
 - word of mouth
 - visibility of group
 - SWCC website

HOW IT WORKS

- **Drop in group for 1.5 hours**
- **Visible location on campus**
- **Introduce students to group, mindfulness and activities available**
- **Encourage them to pay particular attention to their senses and how engaging them through the activity can help them be present, reduce stress in the moment and increase feelings of calmness**
- **Encourage students to notice distractions, without judgment**
- **The only cost of group is “your attention”**
- **Provided: everything for activities, colouring, tea, music, handouts**

CART DISPLAY AT SWCC



GROUP SET UP



GROUP SET UP



ACTIVITIES

- **Examples of activities:**
 - Spider plants
 - Mint division
 - Sansevieria division
 - Seeds to plant
 - Bedding plants from nursery
 - Geranium cuttings







FEEDBACK SURVEY

- **Developed by researchers to evaluate group**
 - Likert scale
 - Qualitative comments
- **Completely voluntary**
- **Not discussed by facilitators**
- **Left on table with other handouts**

FEEDBACK SURVEY

- **Asked about:**
 - Participant descriptive information (sex, age, student status)
 - If group enhanced their knowledge of plants and mindfulness
 - If they thought about stressors during group
 - If they would recommend group to a friend
 - If they would return to group
 - If they knew of the SWCC before group
 - Was it a meaningful experience
 - Room for qualitative comments about what they liked most, what we could change, and what they would take away

FEEDBACK RESULTS

- **50 feedback forms were completed**
- **13 males, 37 females**
- **34 undergraduates, 9 graduates, 7 international**

FEEDBACK RESULTS

- 96% said group enhanced their knowledge of plants (4% neutral)
- 92% said group enhanced their knowledge of mindfulness (8% neutral)
- 90% did NOT think about stressors during group (10% neutral)
- 100% would recommend the group to a friend
- 100% would return to group
- 58% knew of the SWCC services before group
- 98% said it a meaningful experience (2% neutral)

STUDENT COMMENTS

What did you like most about group?

- *“I wasn’t thinking about studying”*
- *“It allowed me to focus on the plant”*
- *“It is different than anything I have ever done”*
- *“Being able to take a plant”*
- *“Inviting and distracting”*
- *“Talking to people”*
- *“Escape from school”*
- *“Open atmosphere, touching the soil”*
- *“Now having my own plant to grow”*

STUDENT COMMENTS

What can we change/improve?

- *“Have it more”*
- *“I would love aloe plants”*
- *“Be here every semester”*
- *“Introduction at the start for newbies”*
- *“Handouts about plants”*
- *“Recipe ideas?”*

STUDENT COMMENTS

What will you take away?

- *“Two beautiful plants and a happy heart”*
- *“Something I can care for”*
- *“A smile”*
- *“Good things come with time”*
- *“Happiness”, “Positivity”*
- *“I never knew what mindfulness was before”*
- *“People are here for us”*
- *“How to be present in the moment”*
- *My plant and knowledge of how to care for it”*

FACILITATOR OBSERVATIONS

- **Students really enjoy group**
- **Many come back every week**
- **Discussions between students**
- **Experience of international students**
- **Bringing friends**
- **Students accessing SWCC services**
- **Students learning**
- **Many people ask to volunteer**

DISCUSSION

- **Overall, very positive feedback**
- **Meaningful experience for facilitators and students**
- **Providing students less threatening connection with a counsellor**
- **Promotes wellness on campus**
- **Suggested continuation of the group**

CHALLENGES

- **Finding space/booking**
 - Wanting to be visible on campus
- **Large numbers**
 - Makes talking to each student difficult
- **Supplies**
 - Plants, seeds, soil, bags, pots etc.
- **Aphids**

IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

- **Green Mindfulness will continue as a regular group offered by the SWCC**
- **Extending group provision to Eastern Health**
 - Youth Treatment Facility
 - Residential Addictions Treatment Facility

QUESTIONS?

