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Research Centre**

A SANE Australia initiative

# **Hocking Fellowship Report 2019- 2020**

**Summary of Findings**

Hocking fellow: Ms Liz Everard





## About the Hocking Fellowship

The Hocking Fellowship is a grant of up to AU\$20,000 to allow Australians to run a research project. Ms Liz Everard was a 2019-2020 Hocking Fellow.

Projects aim to advance public understanding of complex mental health issues, contribute to stigma reduction, or explore innovative approaches to understand the needs and experiences of people affected by complex mental health issues, or improve their wellbeing.

## Background and Aims

'Therapeutic farming' is considered a type of 'green care'. Green care is an umbrella term used to describe a variety of nature-based treatment interventions.

The aim of this Hocking Fellowship project was to research therapeutic farm communities in United States (US) and Ireland that provide psychiatric treatment and a full continuum of care for adults living with complex mental health issues. The purpose of the research was to explore how this model of care could be delivered in Australia.

## Method

Originally, Ms Everard planned to conduct immersive research by visiting therapeutic farming communities overseas, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this could not occur.

Ms Everard reviewed resources and held a series of online meetings with representatives from three farming communities:

- Gould Farm in Massachusetts, USA
- Hopewell in Ohio, USA
- Slí Eile in County Cork, Ireland

## Three Farming Communities

### Gould Farm - Massachusetts, USA



- 700 acre farm
- Oldest therapeutic farming community, and was established in 1913
- Community involves peer specialists, volunteers, staff and families
- Can serve up to 38 guests across three residential houses
- Guests participate in work and individual/group therapies each week
- Has a transitional program for guests who would like additional support while re-engaging with the community.

### Hopewell - Ohio, USA



- 300 acre farm established in 1993
- Staff include licensed social workers and counsellors
- Can serve up to 38 guests across three cottages
- Guests participate in work and therapies each week. In recent years, this has involved more therapeutic interventions such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy.
- Has transitional programs for guests who would like additional support while re-engaging with the community.

### Slí Eile



- Involves an organic farm and traditional bakery
- Community includes peer support workers and tenant progression facilitators
- Can serve up to 14 tenants, and planning to increase housing capacity
- Tenants participate in work and coaching
- Uses the 'C-Me' personal progression framework which focuses on self-identity and social identity.

## Impact of therapeutic farms

There is evidence that therapeutic farms:

- Improve wellbeing and reduce symptoms of mental ill-health such as anxiety and distress
- Improve social functioning and community integration
- Improve likelihood of finding secure paid employment
- Have high treatment satisfaction rates and reduce rates of re-hospitalisation

## Other activity

As a Hocking Fellow, Ms Everard also:

- Established the Thera Farms Australia Facebook page.
- Engaged in media opportunities including television programs, radio interviews, newspaper appearances, and writing newsletter articles.
- Presented at events and conferences.

## Thera Farms Australia

In March 2021, Ms Everard and her team established Thera Farms Australia, that offers an Australian-first, recovery-based model of mental health care combining holistic care with community living and meaningful work in a natural farm setting.

This will be the first therapeutic farm in Australia that will offer a continuum of mental health support options, including residential and transitional programs.

Ms Everard has engaged in a series of consultations to generate interest and support for the model of care, and an upcoming feasibility study. This feasibility study will explore service design, need and service demand, and impact. It will involve a co-design process that meaningfully engages people with lived experience as well as clinicians.

You can learn more about Thera Farms Australia via [www.therafarms.com.au/](http://www.therafarms.com.au/)

“The recent Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System and the 2020 Productivity Commission’s Inquiry into Mental Health provided a watershed moment for Australia to deliver much-needed mental health system reform.

This is the perfect time for us to consider the Thera Farms Australia model of care in the service mix to deliver the holistic, integrated support that Australians with a lived experience of mental illness have been calling for.

Ms Liz Everard

## More information

For more information about Thera Farms Australia, please contact Ms Liz Everard via [liz@therafarms.com.au](mailto:liz@therafarms.com.au)

For more information about the Hocking Fellowship, please contact [info@sane.org](mailto:info@sane.org)