

Interactive Gardens project

Nature-based wellbeing pilots 2026

Five excursions were organised at Elonkierto in cooperation with Oma Häme and the Natural Resources Institute Finland for clients of Oma Häme Adult Psychiatry. Participants were people interested in excursions and spending time in nature. Not all group members knew one another beforehand. On the excursions, participants were supported by an occupational therapist and a mental health nurse from Oma Häme, with whom the themes were planned. At the end of each excursion, participants could also influence the theme and content of the next excursion through a group discussion.

The excursions aimed to strengthen the connection between body and mind through activities in nature and to provide opportunities for shared activity and relaxation. Each excursion began with gentle stretches and Qigong-type movements to settle down and direct attention to the body. This was followed by activities linked to the excursion theme, a relaxation period and a shared snack break. Participants rated their perceived wellbeing at the beginning and end of each excursion on a scale of 4–10. Oral feedback was also collected during the shared snack.

The excursion themes were:

- A sensory journey in springtime elonkierto
- Early summer animal excursion
- Trees as a source of strength
- Encouragement and resources
- Letting go and wishes for the near future

All themes were equally well received. Participants took part according to their own resources, but generally everyone participated actively. They appreciated having enough to do and visiting parts of the park that were unfamiliar to them. The group also engaged in considerable discussion and sharing. On average, the end-of-excursion wellbeing rating increased by one to two points.



A sensory journey in springtime Elonkierto

Participants: 9 people in total: six clients of Oma Häme Adult Psychiatry, an Oma Häme occupational therapist, a mental health nurse and a social and healthcare student

Date and location: 26 May 2026, 12 noon–2 pm. Elonkierto forest garden and lean-to area

Description of activities: The excursion began at the Elonkierto car park by the information board. The group agreed on practical arrangements, rated and, if desired, described their initial feeling on a scale of 4-10, and heard news from Elonkierto and an introduction to the day's theme. The group then moved to the forest garden, observing the chickens on the way. In the forest garden, participants closed their eyes and performed gentle Qigong-type stretches and movements in which a long exhalation was combined with arm movements. They explored around ten plant samples by touching comfrey and elecampane and smelling sweet cicely, wormwood, lovage, marjoram, mint, lily of the valley, lilac, birch and conifers. The group also reflected on memories associated with the plants. There were enough samples for everyone, and participants commented actively. The group then walked through the forest garden and tasted two plants along the way.

At the pond, everyone received a camping mat and chose a preferred place nearby for about 20 minutes of relaxation. Afterwards, the group discussed how relaxation had felt and what they had noticed in nature. The site was sheltered from the wind, and several participants described watching the treetops bend in the strong wind. Finally, the group gathered at the lean-to for juice and grilled sausages and discussed the atmosphere, activities and wishes for the next excursion. Each participant then rated their final feeling.

Successes: The schedule worked well and the amount of activity was appropriate. The plant samples and Qigong stretching interested participants, relaxation went well, and the site was suitable. The wellbeing scale was easy to use and was received positively. Feedback on the excursion content was positive.

Challenges: The therapeutic group's visit needed to be coordinated so that no other groups or noisy maintenance work was taking place at the same time. For example, a summer employee had planned to use a brush cutter during the excursion. Tasting plants was the most difficult activity because it required considerable trust.

Personal observations and learning: A suitable, peaceful place was found for the opening stretches. The facilitator had been nervous about leading them, but this proved unnecessary. Creating a safe and accepting atmosphere was more important than conveying information.

Impacts: Based on observations, the activities appeared to support the beginning of group formation and familiarisation with the excursion format. The sensory exercises directed attention to plants and the wider environment. Participants said they had relaxed and enjoyed nature.

Estimated significance	Recreation 30	Learning 20	Wellbeing/therapy 50
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Early summer animal excursion

Participants: 8 people in total: five clients of Oma Häme Adult Psychiatry, an Oma Häme occupational therapist and a mental health nurse

Date and location: 9 June 2026, 12 noon–2 pm. Elonkierto

Description of activities: The excursion began with an initial well-being rating. The group then moved to the manor park path and continued to the top of the hill, where they viewed the landscape while doing gentle stretches and breathing exercises as on the previous occasion. They discussed how sheep find safety in their flock. The facilitator asked participants to find a natural element on the way to the sheep that could represent safety for them. At the sheep enclosure, each person showed the plant part, cone, patch of moss or other element they had chosen and, if they wished, described what had given them a sense of safety in life.

The group observed the sheep and discussed, among other things, their memory for faces and how to approach them. They entered the enclosure cautiously. One sheep approached boldly, and almost everyone who wished could scratch it. The encounter was considered memorable. The group then visited the chickens and fed them early cabbage. Rustling the bag to attract them was amusing and revealed which hen was highest in the pecking order. At the cows, the group discussed how cows value routines and admired them ruminating on the slope. They then walked slowly towards the goat enclosure, looking at grapes in the greenhouse on the way. In the enclosure they fed the goats willow branches. Finally, the group had coffee and discussion in the gazebo. The atmosphere was relaxed and open, and participants rated their final feeling.

Successes: Encounters with the animals, particularly the sheep, chickens and goats, went well. The shared coffee break in the gazebo was also successful.

Challenges: Keeping to the schedule was difficult, and some participants found it hard to keep up with the group. Some also found the use of a natural element as a symbol of safety difficult to understand. The Oma Häme facilitator helped by giving concrete examples of what could be collected.

Personal observations and learning: In future, it would be better to choose only one theme—such as safety, routines or courage—and prepare its introduction more carefully. The number of animal sites should also be reduced, as two hours passed quickly. The planned relaxation period could not be held; next time it could be placed at the end or carried out in the goat enclosure.

Impacts: The animal encounters provided new experiences. Some situations may also have encouraged participants to try something unfamiliar. Participation was voluntary and could be adjusted individually. Experiences that caused nervousness were shared and discussed.

Estimated significance	Recreation 20	Learning 20	Wellbeing/therapy 60
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Trees as a source of strength

Participants: 7 people in total: five clients of Oma Häme Adult Psychiatry, an Oma Häme occupational therapist and a mental health nurse

Date and location: 23 June 2026, 12 noon–2 pm. Elonkierto and the manor park

Description of activities: At a participant's request, the excursion began by visiting the pigs that had recently arrived at Elonkierto. The pigs ran about and briefly stayed close to the group, prompting discussion about their curiosity. The group then followed the path to the manor park. Along the way, a large maple was examined as a habitat for birds and insects. The tree seemed to come from a fairy tale. The aim was to draw attention to the individual features of trees and their importance for biodiversity.

The group paused in a "hut" formed by the hanging branches of large, small-leaved limes and focused on breathing and calming Qigong movements. They then observed the trees and could hug them if they wished. Each participant had a favourite tree species, and the shelter beneath the limes felt pleasant. Next, the group moved under the canopy of an oak more than 200 years old. Its presence impressed the participants, and its size and form were examined together. Participants estimated the trunk circumference and measured it first by arm span and then with a tape measure. It was considered how trees can offer places of safety during difficult periods in life. Each person then chose a preferred place in the park and relaxed there on a camping mat.

The group returned to Elonkierto along the beautiful riverside path. They stopped at the Willebrand family grave and discussed the history of the manor, which interested participants. At the ravine, the facilitator asked them to find and throw natural objects into the ravine to represent matters they wished to let go of. At the Elonkierto lean-to, the group grilled sausages, listened to birdsong and discussed the day. Trees, pigs and sausages were named as the highlights. Everyone wished to continue the excursions in autumn.

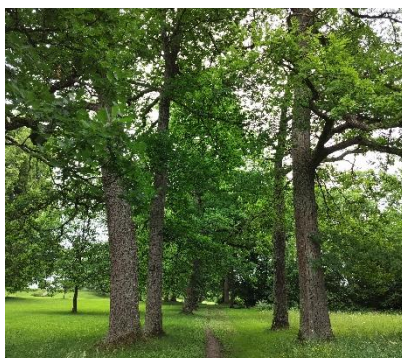
Successes: Participants said the stretching and breathing exercises had relaxed them. Group members looked after one another in challenging terrain. The large trees impressed both the facilitator and participants.

Challenges: The schedule overran, and some planned therapeutic elements could not be implemented. On the other hand, participants wanted to sit longer at the lean-to and enjoy nature. The riverside path had demanding changes in elevation, and some steps at the steepest section were partly decayed. The pigs hid and were more interested in the park's summer workers.

Personal observations and learning: The planned letting-go exercise and expression of a wish should be carried out calmly and with sufficient time.

Impacts: Based on observations, the activities appeared to support group formation and participants' relationship with nature.

Estimated significance	Recreation 30	Learning 20	Wellbeing/therapy 50
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Encouragement and resources

Participants: 5 people in total: three clients of Oma Häme Adult Psychiatry, an Oma Häme occupational therapist and a mental health nurse

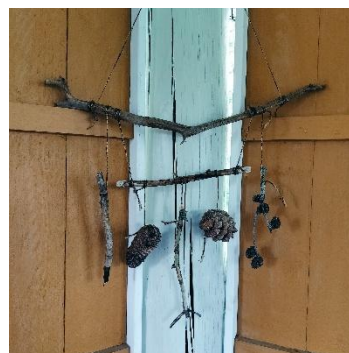
Date and location: 8 September 2026, 12:30–2:30 pm. Elonkierto

Description of activities: The day was rainy and windy, so the programme was adapted for the gazebo area. On the way, the group looked at chicks hatched during the summer and fed apples to the ponies. Although offering them was initially nerve-racking, everyone dared to do it after receiving clear instructions. The group stretched and practiced breathing beside the gazebo.

Greet, hug and encourage exercise: Using a nearby tree, the facilitator demonstrated an individual task. Participants were asked to find a tree that called to them, greet it silently, hug it and offer it encouragement in their thoughts. The facilitator demonstrated by gently touching the tree, looking up at its crown and giving examples of encouraging thoughts. Afterwards, the group discussed the importance of encouragement and how encouraging another person can bring a positive feeling and help one relate more encouragingly to oneself during difficult times.

My resources exercise: In the gazebo, cones from different tree species and short and long dry branches were available. Participants reflected on resources in their lives—personal qualities, close relationships, services, hobbies and skills—and selected natural objects from the materials or surroundings to represent them. The objects could be arranged freely. Ten minutes were allowed. Everyone participated and encouraged by the occupational therapist, each person could name one resource if they wished. Many photographed their arrangement.

Building a wind chime from resources: The facilitator presented a wind chime she had made, explained its construction and demonstrated how to begin by choosing the long top stick and attaching the tying thread. Participants could create their own wind chimes using cones, sticks, yarn and the natural objects representing their resources. Everyone began immediately, and some became deeply absorbed. The activity took about 30 minutes and was discussed afterwards; participants found it enjoyable.



Meditation in space: Seated participants listened to a meditation read by the facilitator and could use a blanket or pillow. Juice and sweet buns were served at the end.

Successes: The group participated actively. The occupational therapist's facilitation supported discussion, and the programme was successfully adapted for the gazebo.

Challenges: Rain and wind restricted the activities. Participants also progressed at different speeds when making the wind chimes.

Personal observations and learning: The facilitator could have encouraged discussion more confidently and was unnecessarily cautious.

Impacts: Based on observations, the exercises appeared to support present-moment awareness and recognition of personal resources.

Estimated significance	Recreation 20	Learning 20	Wellbeing/therapy 60
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Letting go and wishes for the near future

Participants: 6 people in total: four clients of Oma Häme Adult Psychiatry, an Oma Häme occupational therapist and a mental health nurse

Date and location: 15 September 2026, 12:30–2:30 pm. Elonkierto

Description of activities: The excursion began with an initial wellbeing rating. The group then followed the path to a viewpoint on the Elonkierto hill. They admired the landscape and discussed the observatory, the scale model of the solar system and the apple genetic-resource collection. Facing the landscape, they performed Qigong movements intended to gather energy.

Letting-go exercise: Participants were asked to think of something they wished to leave behind in their lives, choose a stone and leave or throw it into the forest. Afterwards, the group discussed whether identifying the matter had been easy or difficult and what feelings it might involve.

Next step exercise: Looking at the landscape, participants considered one small thing they wished for themselves in the coming weeks. Each person chose a feather and expressed the wish by blowing it into the air. Afterwards, the group discussed whether identifying a wish had been easy or difficult.

Space meditation: The facilitator read a meditation while participants rested on yoga mats. Mats, pillows and blankets were available. The place suited relaxation well, and participants would have liked to remain in the sunshine longer.

Caring for the ponies: The group moved to the pony enclosure, where participants became acquainted with the ponies and groomed them. Those who wished could take turns leading a pony for a short circuit.

At the end, the group gathered in the gazebo for coffee and pie, discussed the activities and rated their final feeling.

Successes: Participants said the exercises in the landscape and the space meditation had relaxed them and created positive feelings. Pillows increased comfort, and everyone found a suitable place where the meditation could be heard. Letting go and wishes could be discussed safely without disclosing personal experiences in detail. Participants familiar with animals particularly described grooming and leading the ponies as positive and empowering.

Challenges: The facilitator was a bit nervous around the ponies. The situation was helped by the Oma Häme therapist's riding background and the presence of an Elonkierto pony professional. One pony unexpectedly behaved wilfully and escaped, which may have increased the group's nervousness.

Personal observations and learning: When personal matters were addressed, it felt safe to ask how something had felt or what carrying out a particular activity had been like. The pony experience was not processed sufficiently and should be given time on a future occasion.

Impacts: The exercises gave participants an opportunity to reflect on their lives and seek an experience of relaxation. They also encountered a situation involving nervousness with the ponies.

Estimated significance	Recreation 20	Learning 20	Wellbeing/therapy 60
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Qigong-type movements and other somatic exercises

approximately 10 minutes

Movement	YouTube link; video title or instructions	Time min:s	Channel
Finding the starting position	https://youtu.be/Yp8h5B1PnnE?si=G1W1uG_yv-3c0p66 ; 15-Min Peaceful Morning Qigong To Start Your Day	0:53	Qigong with Kseny
Opening breathing	https://youtu.be/Y88zYo0YlOo?si=DMOIOUgMmASnz1Ks ; Daily Qigong Routine - Easy and Effective!	0:48	Qigong For Vitality
Opening movement	https://youtu.be/R1dRbG7FTJU?si=nxWN05u-R_4EOrc0 ; 10 Min Morning Qigong To Open Chest, Shoulders & Spine	1:03	Qigong with Kseny
Torso rotation	https://youtu.be/Yp8h5B1PnnE?si=G1W1uG_yv-3c0p66 ; 15-Min Peaceful Morning Qigong To Start Your Day	1:20	Qigong with Kseny
Arm swinging	https://youtu.be/Y88zYo0YlOo?si=DMOIOUgMmASnz1Ks ; Daily Qigong Routine - Easy and Effective!	2:50	Qigong For Vitality
Rubbing the palms	https://youtu.be/KeDtfmaVFx0?si=vMOK2R_qxRYTr_Ou ; 20-Min Somatic Exercises to Calm Your Nervous System	1:03	Qigong with Kseny
Tapping the whole body	https://youtu.be/v8Ooxvj86mA?si=7fjZW_13fPD9EoKD ; Daily Qigong Routine #1 30 Day Qigong Challenge	5:47	Qigong with Kseny
Stroking the whole body	With open palms, gently stroke the whole body from the crown of the head to the feet three times while saying: "I am safe in my body; I do not have to live in fear; I love my body."		Not a Qigong movement
Stroking the arms	Gently and simultaneously stroke from opposite shoulders towards the hands, finishing by stroking the palms. Notice the skin of the fingers. A very comforting movement.		Not a Qigong movement
Cloud Hands	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQ6lXq-7Ngk ; Beginner Qigong for Seniors Gentle 10-Minute Daily Routine for Health & Energy	13:54	Qigong For Vitality
Opening movement	https://youtu.be/Y88zYo0YlOo?si=DMOIOUgMmASnz1Ks ; Daily Qigong Routine - Easy and Effective!	1:28	Qigong For Vitality
Compressing the chi	https://youtu.be/Y88zYo0YlOo?si=9SivhLtA1vBRTdb0 ; Daily Qigong Routine - Easy and Effective!	7:37	Qigong For Vitality
Closing breath and listening to oneself	Hands together at navel height, eyes closed		