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## **Community Gardening Project in Rushmoor receives £59K cash boost**

Today, Rushmoor Voluntary Services (RVS), based in Farnborough, have been awarded almost £60,000 from grants scheme Ecominds. The generous donation will be used to develop and support people with or recovering from mental illness into volunteering and training.

The grant has been awarded by Ecominds, a scheme delivered by the mental health charity Mind with £7.5million of funding from the Big Lottery Fund's Changing Spaces scheme. Ecominds is helping thousands of people across the country to improve their mental wellbeing by encouraging them to get outdoors and get active.

Research by Mind has found that this type of ecotherapy can be highly beneficial to people with mental health problems. In a recent study, after just one country walk, 90 per cent of participants had increased self-esteem and 7 per cent reported decreased feelings of depression.

The project will be funded for three years and will involve; maintaining an allotment in Aldershot, participating in community gardening initiatives in the borough and providing training to the volunteers. An important aspect of the work will be to involve the volunteers in community activities and to tackle the isolation and stigma the volunteers face on a daily basis.

One in four people experience mental distress yet there is still a lot of stigma about mental health problems. Social contact has been shown to be the most important factor in gaining better understanding. By improving local environments, Ecominds hopes to promote the inclusion of people with mental health problems into their communities, breaking down barriers and helping to combat mental health discrimination.

Overjoyed at the announcement, Chief Executive of RVS, Greg Alexander said: "We are delighted to receive this grant from Ecominds. We are looking forward to providing support and activities for the volunteers and also helping to improve the community. It is essential that people with or recovering from mental illness are involved with the community and can participate in helping to improve the local environment. Ecominds have invested in our work and we look forward to helping others to make a difference in Rushmoor".

Barry Watts, Grants Manager of Ecominds said "What we liked about this project was that we could see how it would directly benefit the future of people with mental health problems, teaching skills and providing a vital support network. It will be great to follow the progress of this project and watch the funding be put to very good use in the Rushmoor community."

Ecominds has a total of £7.5million to distribute to about 120 new and existing projects over the 5 years. Any group or organisation based in England and working on a not-for-profit basis can apply. To request an application pack or to find out more telephone 0845

367 1671, visit the website at [www.ecominds.org.uk](http://www.ecominds.org.uk) or write to Ecominds, 15-19 Broadway, Stratford, London E15 4BQ.

**\*\*ENDS\*\***

- (1) In 2007 Mind launched the Ecotherapy report for it's annual Mind week. The campaign called for ecotherapy to be recognised as a clinically valid treatment for mental distress. To download the report visit the website at <http://www.mind.org.uk/mindweek2007/report/>

### **Notes to editors**

- Rushmoor Voluntary Services support voluntary action and provide services and support to voluntary and community groups. For more information please contact: Greg Alexander on T: 01252 540162 E: [greg@rvs.org.uk](mailto:greg@rvs.org.uk) or visit [www.rvs.org.uk](http://www.rvs.org.uk)
- Ecominds is a new funding scheme administered by the mental health charity Mind. For more information about Ecominds or Mind please contact the Mind press office on T: 020 8522 1743 M: 07850 788514 E: [media@mind.org.uk](mailto:media@mind.org.uk) ISDN line available: 020 8221 0817.
- Mind is the leading mental health charity in England and Wales. We work to create a better life for everyone with experience of mental distress. [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- Please note that Mind is not an acronym and should be set in title case.
- The Big Lottery Fund's Changing Spaces programme was launched in November 2005 to help communities enjoy and improve their local environments. The programme is funding a range of activities from local food schemes and farmers markets, to education projects teaching people about the environment. Mind was appointed as a Changing Spaces award partner, responsible for distributing £7.5 million through its Ecominds scheme.
- The Big Lottery Fund, the largest of the National Lottery good cause distributors, has been rolling out grants to health, education, environment and charitable causes across the UK since its inception in June 2004. It was established by Parliament on 1 December 2006.

Big Lottery Fund Press Office: 020 7211 1888  
Public enquiries line: 08454 102030

Out of hours: 07867 500 572  
Textphone: 08456 021 659

Full details of the work of the Big Lottery Fund, its programmes and awards are available on the website: <http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk>