

# The impact of our garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2024

With thanks to



# Introduction

We're the leading charity for muscle wasting and weakening conditions. We connect a community of more than 110,000 people living with one of over 60 conditions so that everyone can get the healthcare, support and treatments needed to feel good, mentally and physically.

Living with a muscle wasting or weakening condition can be exhausting, stressful and lonely. With endless medical appointments, physiotherapy, treatments and respiratory support. That's why, for over 60 years, we've been building our community.



Thank you for allowing me to volunteer on the garden at Chelsea – what an absolutely fantastic opportunity to talk about the charity and the difference it makes to families like mine. I feel very honoured to have been a tiny part of it!

Kerry Spink,  
volunteer



# The opportunity

The chance for us to have a garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show was the perfect opportunity to raise awareness and help change the future of muscle wasting conditions.

A big challenge of a muscular dystrophy diagnosis is that no one has heard of your condition, you know no one living with it, and you have to explain it to everyone. The garden helped change that. It allowed us to reach people who had never heard of muscle wasting and weakening conditions, to give our community a voice, and to raise awareness of our charity work.



# Working with our garden designer

We were introduced to Ula Maria by our Vice President Alex Wellesley Wesley. Ula immediately understood us and was able to come up with a design that was true to her style, and which had the needs of our community at its very heart.

Ula was inspired by hearing Martin Hywood's diagnosis story. Martin shared how, after hearing his diagnosis, he felt so alone, even though his wife was nearby, and how devastated he felt at the uncertainty that now faced him. Ula came back with her garden concept based on the Japanese practice of forest bathing which promotes the benefits of being in nature. Her vision was to create an accessible space that made the most of the forest and all the mental and physical health benefits it brings.



Martin Hywood



## Fundraising income from RHS Chelsea

**£43,000**

In sponsorship and  
donations for events  
throughout the week

**£10,000**

In a new corporate  
donation for support  
with our garden  
relocation following  
their visit to our garden

**£9,800**

From charity auctions

**£600**

From open gardens

**£1,100**

From train station  
collections

**£9,657**

In ad-hoc donations  
from visitors to the show

**Total £74,157**



## Engaging our audience

### Our Open Gardens fundraising product


We kept our community at the heart of everything we did throughout the planning and delivery of the garden. Taking them on the journey with us. As part of this, we developed a new community led fundraising product, encouraging people to open their gardens in celebration of our presence at the show and to raise funds for the charity.

### Waterloo station collections

We also partnered with National Rail at Waterloo train station and held a bucket collection throughout show week, working with our volunteers. This ensured our brand was seen from the minute people stepped off the train, right through to travelling to the show and back. This was a boost to awareness.



# Engaging our audience



It was an absolute pleasure to join the team in their award-winning garden. Thank you so much for extending the invitation out to neuromuscular healthcare professionals – it was wonderful to spend time in the gorgeous garden and meet some of the team face-to-face.

Jodi Allen, NHS

## Three business breakfasts

One for key supporters and two hosted by Trustees for their networks.

## Two evening events

One to raise awareness about muscle wasting conditions amongst non-neurological healthcare professionals (such as GPs) and a second corporate event in partnership with Nurture Landscapes.

## Ticket competitions

We ran two competitions ahead of the show, one to a warm audience of regular donors and one to a cold audience through Facebook ads.

The winner of the competition promoted to our warm audience was a regular supporter and lived with a muscle wasting condition.



**We had an absolutely amazing time. This was our first visit to Chelsea, and it was incredible. The best part of course was meeting the MDUK team in the garden.**

Competition winner



Our second competition was targeted at a cold audience and received 124 entries, of which over 96% were new supporters who signed up to our newsletter to enter. Six months later, we have sent them two more garden specific updates and have had only two people unsubscribe so far. This has given us the confidence to continue to share garden news with this new audience whilst sharing engaging stories about our community to steward them towards becoming donors.



# Raising awareness of muscle wasting conditions amongst healthcare professionals



When I visited A&E with an injury, the doctor couldn't understand why I couldn't move my arm in a certain way, he thought I was being difficult.

MDUK survey respondent,  
March 2024



This evening event was inspired by feedback from a community survey we conducted earlier in the year. In this survey, a clear priority of respondents was for us to educate healthcare professionals about muscle wasting and weakening conditions, so that those affected felt confident when seeing their GP about medical issues. The event meant that we were able to treat NHS workers to an evening at the Show, while using the opportunity for them to network with neuromuscular specialists, members of our community, and share educational materials about muscle wasting and weakening conditions.



Thanks for the invitation to the GPs event. I had some really valuable conversations, particularly with someone who has muscular dystrophy, she gave me some really helpful insight about her experiences of the healthcare system that will definitely inform my practice going forwards.

Amy, NHS England



The outcomes were impressive

**100**

Healthcare professionals attended

The Medical Director for Professional Development at the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) attended and spoke about the importance of taking part in e-modules for neuromuscular conditions

Attending healthcare professionals were encouraged to sign up to our **Neuromuscular Conditions GP Upskilling Webinar** held in September – as a result we had **91 people register**.

We promoted the benefits of attendees joining our **Regional Neuromuscular networks** that bring together neuromuscular clinicians and allied health professionals in their local area to discuss how to support those receiving care from specialist and community neuromuscular services.

By building new relationships and networks through this unique event, we were able to share knowledge and widen the understanding of muscle wasting and weakening conditions across the NHS.





# Connecting with the muscle wasting community

The team were struck by how many visitors were moved by our garden.

Our volunteers took time to speak to them and when a connection to our cause was discovered, they were invited onto the garden. Ula was overwhelmed that her creation could have such an emotional effect on our community. We heard stories of family, friends and neighbours of people living with a condition – all of whom were appreciative and delighted that muscle wasting and weakening conditions were being represented on a national stage.

On the final day of the show, we decided to let all wheelchair users, and those with mobility issues, onto the garden. The impact of the garden being fully accessible was fully realised and our disabled visitors felt the joy of experiencing something designed just for them.

Our favourite moment was when we invited Martin and Tracey on to our garden. Tracey lives with a muscle wasting condition and as she entered the garden, in her wheelchair, Martin – who was not far behind – was incredibly moved and made the snap decision to propose. It was a truly special moment and demonstrated the power of the garden and what it meant for our community to be able to experience it firsthand.



## Accessibility

Our garden had to be completely accessible for our community so they could fully experience the benefits of forest bathing when they visited. It was important for us to know the right facilities were available for our community and all disabled visitors at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. We worked alongside the RHS to advise them about Changing Places toilets which are fitted with a hoist and adult changing facility. We were delighted the RHS took our advice on board and installed the first ever Changing Places toilet at the show.



**We're going with a Changing Places compliant facility this year. Thank you for helping us make the show a little more accessible than it was before!**

Gemma Lake,  
RHS Shows Manager 



# Publicity and social media impact

Our garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show gave us unparalleled opportunities that we would not have had otherwise. During Show week our reach and engagement on social media was phenomenal, way above levels we have ever seen.

Our website sessions in May increased to the highest amount in three years and we got media coverage in titles where we don't usually get coverage. This has allowed us to reach new people and raise awareness of the charity to new audiences. There have been many learnings around content creation, messaging and the project really highlighted the power of collaborative posts on Instagram - a learning that has bought success to other projects.

## Website impact


Our website traffic increased by 14,528 on the month before and 37,482 on the same month the year prior during the Chelsea flower show. Our website sessions in May have increased to the highest amount in three years. This is invaluable reach for us as a charity.


We gained 189 newsletter sign ups from our RHS Chelsea Flower Show campaign We had been losing around 300 subscribers from our email news each month so gaining these subscribers is valuable to us.

	2023	2024	
JAN	35,942	45,868 ▲	(+27%)
FEB	35,942	46,782 ▲	(+30%)
MAR	46,206	51,515 ▲	(+11%)
APR	43,536	59,052 ▲	(+35%)
MAY	54,397	72,580 ▲	(+33%)
JUN	36,098	55,053 ▲	(+52%)
JUL	35,817		
AUG	38,813		
SEP	44,702		
OCT	55,762		
NOV	41,698		
DEC	34,633		

## Social media

	Average Engagement		Reach	
	PRE CHELSEA	DURING	PRE CHELSEA	DURING
Facebook	2.6%	3.33% ▲	74,000	365,000 ▲
Instagram	5.73%	3.33% ▲	1,969 (per post)	3,405 ▲
X	40	1,000 ▲	na	na
Linkedin	0.08%	27% ▲	na	na





278

25

39

**musculardystrophyuk** We're over the moon to have been awarded Best in Show at @the\_rhs Chelsea Flower Show. This means our garden scored the highest amount of points from the judging panel out of all the Show Gardens. A huge well done to @ulamariastudio for designing a multi-award winning garden and thank you @project.giving.back for your generous funding. We're blown away and want to dedicate all our successes to our community.

We're the leading charity for more than 110,000 people in the UK living with one of over 60 muscle wasting or weakening conditions. The stories of people in our community inspired @ulamariastudio's accessible forest bathing garden design.

Raising awareness of these rare conditions is so important and we continue to fund groundbreaking research, campaign for access to treatments and provide support for families living with diagnoses right now.

Thank you to @project.giving.back for this once in a lifetime opportunity to do this.

Together we are changing the future of muscle wasting conditions.

Photo by @rubyekah\_8

21 May 2024

Our top performing post



I think rather than Saturday being the end of the show it was just the start of the new journey for the charity, and I suspect you will be exceptionally busy capitalising on the press coverage and the new celebrity contacts made to carry on flying the flag for the charity.

Michelle Anthony, Trustee

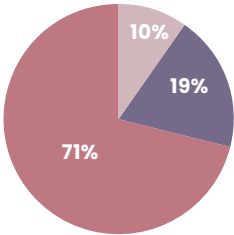


Media coverage

Number of printed media mentions: 425  
(1 October 2023 – 30 June 2024)

The majority (71%) of coverage was online, followed by (19%) broadcast and (10%) print.

Almost all mentions (389 – 92%) appeared during the month of May, and over half (232) on 21st May, directly after press day.



302  
Online

81  
Broadcast

42  
Print

283m  
Total reach

£3.2m  
Total AEV

203m  
Total online visits

Radio Network	7	(1.65%)
Local Newspaper	7	(1.65%)
Regional Newspaper	9	(2.12%)
National Newspaper	12	(2.82%)
Other	16	(2.76%)
Television Network	26	(6.16%)
Magazine	31	(7.29%)
News Website	33	(7.76%)
Regional Newspaper Website	33	(7.76%)
Radio Station	43	(10.12%)
National Newspaper Website	49	(11.53%)
Magazine Website	51	(12%)
Local Newspaper Website	83	(19.53%)

Most mentions

GARDENS  
ILLUSTRATED

PRO LANDSCAPER

yahoo!

MailOnline

THE  TIMES

THE ENGLISH  
GARDEN

 COUNTRY LIVING

B B C

EXPRESS 

HOUSE &  
GARDEN

 House Beautiful

The Telegraph





## Relocation

The garden is currently being relocated to The Prince and Princess of Wales Hospice in Glasgow. The garden will be used as a new space, particularly for young patients who visit the hospice. There are 51 young adults currently using the hospice of which 16 have a form of muscular dystrophy.

At the time of writing, Ula has drawn the new plan for the garden and we are intending to get the trees in the ground by Christmas. The remaining plants are being cared for in a hospice-made plant hospital where they have been catalogued and cared for.

We are aiming to open the garden in Spring 2025.



It was a spectacular day at the show, something I will remember for a lifetime. An incredible opportunity for people to find out more about Muscular Dystrophy UK.



Tanvi Vyas MBE,  
Disability Equality Consultant

## Immeasurable impact

There is no doubt that funding from Project Giving Back achieved our aims of raising awareness of muscle wasting and weakening conditions.

The opportunity gave us **huge uplift in social media** and media coverage, enabling more people to find out about our work.

What was also surprising was the impact it had on our existing supporters. **Many that donate regularly, doubled their donation immediately after the show**, and members of our events committees – who already give up lots of their time to **organise fundraising events** – did even more, with some signing up for challenges such as the London Marathon and trekking Kilimanjaro.

All 24/25 challenge events in the MDUK portfolio, including our Pedal Paddle Peak events, Great North Run and London Marathon 2025 sold out early which we put down to **the 'Chelsea effect'**.

We ensured **greater accessibility to the RHS Chelsea Flower show** by providing guidance and information around Changing Places Toilets which had over 130 visits during Chelsea week.

What was most telling was the impact on our community, those that we work with to help them live well with their muscle wasting condition. They were **proud to be represented on a national stage** and were able to speak more freely about their own condition with confidence and renewed optimism.



**Thank you**