

The Restorative Power of Nature to Promote Mental Health and Wellbeing

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The use of nature and the outdoors to help alleviate the growing mental health crisis is now more urgent than ever before. We live in a time of enormous societal, political and economic upheaval that is contributing to worsening mental health outcomes particularly amongst our children and young people. Mental health has now overtaken cancer and obesity as society's most pressing health problem. Some psychiatrists argue that this is the most serious public health problem we now face and that we need to look beyond traditional mental health care approaches and towards our environment. This includes an important role for green infrastructure in our cities and towns.

Roe will set out the science demonstrating how access to nature in our cities supports mental health and wellbeing. She will show how contact with nature supports brain health, stress regulation, emotional and social wellbeing, and alleviates the symptoms of serious mental health problems such as PTSD and schizophrenia. Drawing on theory and evidence from her scholarly outputs, she will posit how nature can contribute to individual and collective restoration and serve as a 'civic good'.

References

Roe, J., & McCay, L. (2021). *Restorative cities: Urban design for mental health and wellbeing*. Bloomsbury.

Roe, J. (forthcoming). *Restorative architecture: The science of design for mental health and wellbeing*. Bloomsbury.

Author Biography

Dr. Jenny Roe is a Professor and Director of the Center for Design & Health in the School of Architecture, University of Virginia. An environmental psychologist and former head of Landscape Architecture for an international architectural practice, she writes, lectures, and consults for a wide range of academic and public audiences on human health-centered design for the built environment. She is an expert in restorative environments that support mental health including an important role for public parks and urban green spaces. Her book on this subject, *Restorative Cities: Urban Design for Mental Health and Wellbeing* (Roe & McCay, 2021) explores a new way of designing cities that puts mental health at the forefront. A companion book under development will set out an evidence-based approach for designing interiors for mental health, *Restorative Architecture, the Science of Design for Mental Health and Wellbeing* (Bloomsbury, 2027).

Roe has won numerous awards and research grants exploring a rich variety of architectural and landscape contexts and their psychological impact on people. Her scholarly outputs include over sixty peer reviewed publications including those for the World Health Organization and the Lancet. She sits on the board of directors for The Center for Advanced Design Research &

Evaluation (US), is an advisor for the Design Council (UK) on health-related design, and recently joined the Scientific Advisory Board for the Max Planck Institute for Human Development.

She is a former Senior Research Leader in Human Wellbeing and Behavior Change for the Stockholm Environment Institute, where she worked with environmental scientists and health professionals to find solutions to build sustainable, resilient and healthy cities across the globe. Prior to academia, she was Principal Landscape Architect in a multi-disciplinary architectural practice in London called Sprunt, specializing in social housing, educational and healthcare design.

For more information, please refer to her website: www.jennyjroe.com