

PRESS RELEASE

YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH: THE URGENT NEED TO RECONNECT WITH NATURE

Faced with the mental health problems experienced by adolescents, the **Forest4Youth** project, co-funded by Interreg North-West-Europe, is proposing an innovative solution: **exploring the therapeutic power of forests to improve teenagers' well-being**.

Today, **17.5% of young people in North-Western Europe suffer from mental disorders** such as depression, anxiety or addiction. Mental health services are struggling to meet this growing demand. It is therefore essential to rethink therapeutic support by integrating varied, more accessible and sustainable approaches.

THE FOREST, A NATURAL RECOVERY AREA

Research shows that **forest immersion has a direct and beneficial impact on mental health**, particularly on symptoms of depression and anxiety, reducing stress, improving mood and promoting concentration. Yet these natural therapies remain under-exploited.

More than 20% of North-Western Europe is covered by natural areas that could be used for the benefit of adolescents living with mental health problems.

The **Forest4Youth** project improves the integration of the forest in therapeutic devices thanks to the following results :

- **Identification of 8 pilot therapeutic forests** in several European countries
- The development of a **care protocol** combining **real immersion** in the forest and **virtual reality**
- Accompanying **400 adolescents in therapeutic forest programs**
- Training for **mental health professionals and foresters**
- The creation of **5 reference training centers**

A TRANSNATIONAL APPROACH FOR A LASTING IMPACT

Forest4Youth is based on an unprecedented collaboration between mental health professionals and the owners and managers of forests and green spaces. The aim is to **develop accessible solutions that can be implemented on a large scale**, so that young people can benefit from these therapies.

"Reconnecting teenagers with nature gives them a chance to improve their mental health," explain the project's initiators.

The project also calls on public decision-makers to **integrate these solutions into health and regional planning policies**.

At a time when the mental health of young people is becoming a **societal emergency**, natural spaces represent a precious and widely available resource: exploiting them for their well-being is a necessity.

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More information on **MentalNET.EU** and **forest4youth.nweurope.eu**

THE PROJET TEAM :



Partenaires associés



For Wallonia



Forest4Youth



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Partenaires du projet FOREST4Youth	
Centre Neuro Psychiatrique Saint-Martin (CNP)	BE
UNature (UN)	LU
The Royal College of Surgeons In Ireland RCSI)	IE
Société Royale Forestière de Belgique (SRFB)	BE
Association Elan Argonnais (AEA)	FR
Bruxelles Environnement - Forêt et Nature (BE)	BE
Landesforst MV- Waldservice und Energie GmbH	DE
Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB)	BE
Etablissement public de santé mentale de la Marne (EPSM)	BE
Partenaires associés	
BioCon Valley GmbH	DE
Union Nationale de Familles et Amis de Personnes Malades et Handicapées Psychiques (Marne)	FR
SIMILES Wallonie asbl - Familles et amis de personnes atteintes de troubles psychiques	BE
European Federation of Associations of Families of People with Mental Illness (EUFAMI)	BE
Forest Therapy Hub	PT
Confederation Européenne des Propriétaires Forestiers	BE
Centre de Référence en Santé Mentale	BE
Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte, Sláinte & Folláine (HSE)	IE
Teagasc	IE
Fondation EPI	LU