Growing Ability

A Social Therapeutic Horticulture Project for Adults with Support Needs

Focusing on the abilities and support needs of each individual

Information Pack for parents, carers and care professionals

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Introduction

The project provides a **structured programme of social and therapeutic horticulture** (STH) geared to the support needs, abilities and personal development goals of each individual. Please note that those attending the project are not referred to as service users or clients, but as **gardeners**; and this terminology is used throughout this pack.

Whilst the basis of the project is therapeutic, gardeners are encouraged to take as active a role as they feel able. We seek to promote both **individual responsibility** as well as **team working**. We strive for a **relaxed environment** in which individuals feel **safe** and where they can **enjoy** their time. Once these two criteria are met, gardeners can begin to **learn and benefit** from their experience.

What is Social Therapeutic Horticulture?

At its simplest we use gardening / horticulture and associated activities to help individuals improve different aspects of their lives and thus their overall **quality of life**. STH is a form of occupational therapy, key objectives of which are supporting individuals to become more socially and economically active.

Why gardening/horticulture?

Gardening and horticulture are powerful media that have beneficial qualities and provide a range of opportunities:

Relaxing – the outdoors can provide a quiet environment away from some of the stresses of daily life;

Sense of purpose – it provides what occupational therapists call 'meaningful occupation', something we all need. A sense that we are contributing to something and that our contribution is valued, either personally or financially;

Everyday activity – it is an activity that millions of people do; it is not something special or different;

Wide range of tasks – there is a broad range of tasks to suit both individuals' interests and strengths. It is a key part of the project to focus on individuals' abilities and not their disabilities;

continued over

The Triangle Community Garden is a Registered Charity (No 1145243) and Company Limited by Guarantee (No 07676360) whose projects include Growing Ability, New Shoots, Friday Garden Club, Triangle Tribe and Family Forest School.
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What are the benefits of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture?

The first point to make is that the benefits are '**self-determined**', i.e. they relate to the needs and personal development aims of each individual.

The following is a list of some of the benefits – increased or improved

- **Self-confidence** – this is possibly the most important way in which we can help as it is the foundation of every other aspect of life;
- **Self-esteem** – once self-confidence is improving it is then possible to work on self-esteem;
- **Decision making** – another area where self-confidence is a pre-requisite but which is crucial to promoting independence;
- **Physical health** – people with learning disabilities and other support needs often also experience other medical problems eg diabetes, cardiac problems, poor diet [1]. Regular exercise can help in some cases as can learning about healthy diet. Sometimes growing your own food can be the breakthrough that is needed to help an individual engage with a wider range of healthy foods. We can also provide practical support to help people realise that it is still possible to lead a meaningful life;
- **Mental health** – people with learning disabilities are up to 15% more likely to experience mental health problems than a broader cross section of the community [2]. This can be because of adverse life factors or lack of social support. Everyone who gardens knows how relaxing working in a garden can be and these same benefits can help those experiencing a wide range of mental health issues.
- **Fitness** – The physical aspects of gardening can help those who otherwise lead a sedentary life to improve their level of fitness, both strength and stamina. In this situation the exercise is implicit in the activity rather than being specifically exercise to get fitter.
- **Literacy and Numeracy** – work on improving these skills where required is embedded into what we do – eg counting number of pots required, measuring lengths of wood, writing plant labels, working out number of plants required to fill a bed.
- **Social skills** – This is an incredibly important aspect of all STH projects. We provide an opportunity for acquiring social skills, particularly important for those on the autistic spectrum, social interaction and expanding social circles / gaining new friends.
- **Work skills** – There is a wide range of work skills which can be integrated into the project according to the needs of the individual – commitment to attending, timekeeping, use of phone if not able to attend, following rules, understanding instructions, working in teams. There is also the opportunity for individuals to develop leadership skills by coordinating the work of others to help them in their tasks.

Why gardening/horticulture?

Adaptability of tasks – it is possible to adapt many tasks to suit the skill / fitness level of the individual, for example large seeds for those with poor fine motor control, hand weeding for those who are not so physically able.

Grounding: Being outside enables individuals to gain / regain an awareness of nature, the seasons, the weather and the soil;

Green environment – "There are clear benefits to green spaces in terms of health and welfare. The common theme is stress. The more natural the environment the more relaxed you get. A green environment is very conducive to reducing stress levels. This can have positive impacts on health. There is evidence that a walk in the park is more relaxing — studies show that blood pressure goes down more quickly than on a walk through the city centre." A quote from Ross Cameron, a biologist at the University of Reading who has specialised in the issue. [3]

Social activity – it provides a ready forum for social activity both in the sessions themselves and sometimes in friendships which develop;

Nurture – It provides an opportunity for individuals to take responsibility and care for another living organism. Sometimes this is the first such opportunity in an individual's life. The people / plant relationship is often said to be at the heart of social and therapeutic horticulture. The great benefit of this relationship is that it is non-threatening – plants do not answer back.

Raising horizons and hope – through the medium of horticulture it is possible to help individuals to plan ahead, eg using seeds that will germinate in a week and then gradually extending the timescale so that individuals can begin to develop hope about the future and develop ambition.

'Hook' for other things – whilst gardening and horticulture remain the central theme of the project they also provide links to other related activities including an interest in nature and the environment, art, crafts, woodwork, healthy eating etc. These all help extend individuals' interest / skills and therefore their self-confidence and self-esteem.

What are the entry requirements?

There are no set entry criteria, other than having some form of long term support need eg a learning disability, brain injury, autism or mental illness. However with a limited number of places we seek to focus on individuals who will benefit from the structured approach. Placements are reviewed regularly but are not time limited.

Where is the project based?

The Triangle Community Garden is based at Ransom's Recreation Ground, a park in Hitchin, situated between Nightingale Road and Grove Road.

We have developed several allotments on the site within the park, and also work within the Triangle Community Garden which is situated at the north east corner of the park (the Grove Road end).

The Triangle Community Garden has use of the park pavilion (refurbished in 2010). This provides the project with a workshop, toilet and kitchen facilities.

What activities do the gardeners undertake?

Gardeners undertake a wide range of activities. All the usual gardening jobs, plus woodwork (eg building raised beds and compost bins) as well as taking an interest in their natural surroundings. We encourage them to grow the crops / flowers they want, to follow the whole process through from seed sowing to harvest and, if they wish, to take some home to cook and eat. Any surplus produce is offered for sale outside the Pavilion by the gardeners or is made into jams and chutneys by Triangle Garden volunteers.

Whilst we are not certified organic, we operate on similar principles. We use natural methods to control weeds and pests without artificial chemicals, and use organic seeds and fertilisers, and peat-free compost wherever possible.

As the project has expanded we have been able to incorporate a broader range of opportunities such as cooking, walking as a group, art and crafts, and various forms of work experience.

Groups and / or individuals from the project are also able to engage in the range of activities run by the Triangle Community Garden – volunteer sessions, open days and other community events etc.

How do you know the service is meeting an individual's needs?

Within the first few weeks of a placement starting we carry out a comprehensive Initial Assessment to identify an individual's capabilities and support needs. At the same time we prepare an Individual Development Plan which seeks to set out an individual's longer term aims and up to five supporting objectives – i.e. things they want to work on / improve while they are with us – eg self-confidence, skills, fitness, stamina, healthy eating.

When are the sessions?

Growing Ability sessions are currently run on half days Tuesday to Thursday. As numbers permit further sessions will be added so please enquire if you are interested in a session outside these times.

Who runs the project?

Each session is run by two fully trained care professionals with expertise in horticultural therapy. The project is led and overseen by our Project Manager, Hayley Lanfear.

What is the staffing ratio?

We always have two members of staff on site. This is to ensure that there is always one member of staff to look after the group in the event of an accident /incident. This also allows us to provide a more person-centred service and a wider range of activities. We are supported by several excellent volunteers who are appropriately vetted to work alongside adults with support needs.

We can take a maximum of 8 adults with low support needs. Where the intake includes individuals with medium or high support needs, the maximum number of adults per session is reduced accordingly.

We always strive to offer a place to a potential member but sometimes, because of an individual's support needs and our existing commitments to other gardeners, such an offer will be subject to them being accompanied by a support worker which, if required, we can provide as part of the package.

At the end of every session, gardeners take part in a simple review/feedback process assisted by trained staff, who record any breakthroughs, milestones, needs or issues they may have. Each member's Individual Development Plan is reviewed on a quarterly basis. Gardeners are asked for feedback on the project which is included in the monthly report from the Project Manager to the Triangle Community Garden Trustees. Gardeners are also encouraged to take photos of the things they like and all have the opportunity to contribute to the communal scrapbook / portfolio to record their activity at the project.

What are the progression opportunities?

There is no fixed period for a placement, however where relevant we work with other members of each gardener's support team to help them to move on to fresh challenges and opportunities as they are ready – either within the project or outside. This may include volunteering, new college courses, work experience or paid work.

What is the referral procedure?

Individuals can self-refer or referrals can be made by professionals (social workers, support workers etc) or by relatives:

1. The first step is to contact our Project Manager to discuss a possible placement – either by email or phone – contact details are below. If there is no answer, please leave a message and we will get back to you as soon as possible.
2. We then make an appointment for the potential new 'gardener' to visit the project, with support if necessary, as we believe this is the best way for an individual to assess the project and decide if they would like to attend.
3. Assuming that an individual wishes to join the project, then they will be provisionally offered a place or, if we are full, placed on a waiting list.
4. Only at this stage is it necessary to complete any paperwork. We have a referral form which needs to be completed by a professional plus other basic documentation which can be completed by the potential gardener or an advocate / support worker on their behalf.

We must have a signed referral form and, where appropriate, signed contract documentation before the placement is formally confirmed and a start date agreed.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Hayley Lanfear
Project Manager

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References
(1) Mind 2005, Factsheet Statistics 1: How common is mental distress?
(2) The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2003. Health needs of people with learning disabilities.
(3) Times Newspaper 10 Oct 2009 Ross Cameron, a biologist at the University of Reading who has specialised in the issue).

How are places funded?

We aim to provide a range of funding options for our placements, however the majority of new placements need to be individually funded, via a personalised budget from Adult Care Services, or personally from direct payments, private means or other benefits.

If you or someone you know is interested we would encourage you to visit and discuss your situation with a member of staff. We aim not to turn people away and are always looking for new ways to fund our service.

In common with similar projects locally our charges are based on the level of support need for each gardener, as assessed by our staff on the basis of cognitive ability, need for physical support and need for social / motivational support.

Our charges **per 2.5 hour session** are:
Low support needs - £32.80
Medium support needs - £49.21
High support needs - £78.73 (unless they attend with their own support in which case they are charged at the low rate).

What safeguards are in place?

The project is monitored by Herts County Council under the PAMMS scheme. Our current status is Good. We employ competent and experienced personnel who are committed to delivering a high quality, person-centred service. We have a comprehensive range of policies and procedures in place including – Adult Safeguarding, Equal Opportunities and Health and Safety. Our risk assessment strategy provides for assessment of the site, the activity and the individual. There are project rules which all those attending must follow and a complaints procedure should any member of the project feel the need to use it.

Any other questions?

If so please do not hesitate to contact us. You are most welcome to arrange a visit to find out more and see if the project may suit you, a relative or one of your clients.