



Enriching lives through horticulture

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Administrator, Thrive

Thrive has achieved recognition in the UK, and beyond, as the authoritative organisation in all areas of social and therapeutic horticulture. The charity was formed in 1978 to promote and support the use of social and therapeutic horticulture. Its mission is to enrich people's lives by enabling disadvantaged, disabled and older people through gardening to participate fully in the social and economic life of the community. This descriptive article looks at the work of the organisation and provides information about the training it has to offer. In short, Thrive uses gardening and horticulture to enrich people's lives.

In the first 16 years of its existence, Thrive – then called Horticultural Therapy – provided advice and support to around 400 projects. Since it was renamed and relaunched in 1994, the organisation has expanded considerably. We now have over 1600 projects on our database and estimate that they provide services for about 60,000 people every year.

The main areas of our work comprise:

- running four garden projects
- supporting a network of over 1600 projects across the UK – where horticulture is used within programmes of training and employment, therapy and health
- providing expert advice on easier gardening – enabling thousands of older and disabled people to enjoy the benefits of gardening
- researching and promoting the benefits of horticultural activity – increasing understanding and awareness of the power gardening has to change people's lives.

Often people discovering Thrive for the first time think that social and therapeutic horticulture is something new. Ever since humans came into contact with plants they have used them for their benefit: for food, shelter and medicine. The desire to provide healing through involvement with nature can be traced back to Ancient Egypt. In the 19th century Esqurol, a French psychiatrist, had gardens incorporated into the design of his asylums. He asserted that: *'The calm that the psychiatric patient now enjoys, far from the tumult and noise, and the mental rest conferred by removal from their business and domestic problems, is very favourable to their recovery.'*

Gardening benefits

Most gardeners know intuitively that gardening is good for you and that is one reason gardening is so extensively used in health and social care. Gardening offers people the chance to



Green shoots: Gardening can lift your mood

get into intimate contact with the natural world. We can all benefit from that contact and people who are damaged, isolated or disadvantaged in some way can often benefit more. Most find gardening healing for both body and spirit.

The health benefits of gardening have been well chronicled over many years – even at government level. The Health Education Authority has identified gardening as the main method through which older people can get the half hour of activity a day that promotes health, strength and mobility. It increases heart rate and the feeling of well-being. Research has shown that looking out of your hospital window onto vegetation can increase the rate of recovery from surgery and that workers with a view of nature or plants in their work environment have fewer headaches, less stress and more job satisfaction. (Chambers, 2002).

More than six million people in the UK live with sensory or physical impairment, mental ill-health or learning difficulties, either from birth or through accident, illness or old age. Gardening is the main hobby of over one third of the 1.7 million visually impaired people in the UK, 66 per cent of whom are over the age of 75 (Bruce, McKennell and Walker, 1991).

Gardening activity, if applied in an appropriate manner, can provide a raft of benefits. It can, for example:

- provide structure to a person's day and the opportunity to gain or relearn a hobby
- provide the opportunity to regain a sense of responsibility – plants require commitment
- provide a point of shared enthusiasm that can connect the therapist or other worker to their client
- improve numeracy and literacy skills
- provide an inexpensive and accessible leisure skills opportunity on discharge from a hospital
- increase functional goals such as attention span and concentration, improving problem-solving
- provide sensory stimulation in a low stress environment – sitting or actively gardening can reduce agitation and can have a calming effect on many people
- offer meaningful work
- offer a sense of creative achievement, increasing self-esteem
- provide the opportunity for increased self-sufficiency in food production and healthy eating – along with all the associated health benefits
- provide an end product that can be eaten, grown or sold. Gardening can offer a way of earning money, not just by selling plants but also through providing gardening services to others
- be socially inclusive. Gardening is a 'normal' activity and can be undertaken on any scale and on any budget. The fact that it is a normal, everyday activity means that it can draw people in who would reject other interventions.

A gardening therapy programme can achieve all the above, but needs to be correctly planned, implemented and assessed in order to fully meet the needs of the individual. For some people it is enough simply to have access to a garden, allotment, or horticultural activity and a group of people with whom to share the passion. For others, this may not in itself prove therapeutic



Seeds of change: anyone can benefit from the joy of gardening

and a structured and planned programme is needed to ensure the needs of the individual are fully met.

Core skills

There is no set formula to developing a programme of therapeutic horticulture. The key is to identify the needs of the individual and having or acquiring the skills to match these needs with a relevant horticultural programme that is effectively run, assessed and evaluated. There are key core and specialist skills that can be developed to improve the quality of service for the the individual. It is within this area that Thrive seeks to support the practitioner, by offering a range of short training courses and other services.

In the UK there are over 5,000 people employed in social and therapeutic horticulture and one of the ways in which Thrive seeks to support them in their work is by providing appropriate training. Participants attending Thrive short courses come from a variety of different backgrounds. The majority are people currently working within a project situation who are looking to expand their knowledge and expertise in order to more fully meet the needs of the people with whom they work. Participants fall into two categories: those who come from a mainstream

horticultural background and those come from a care background such as occupational therapists, care workers or nurses. The gardening activities in which they are involved range from small-scale, table-top gardening in a hospice to a seemingly conventional nursery production unit or garden centre where people with learning difficulties are acquiring numeracy, literacy, social and work skills through the medium of horticulture.

Many people feel they are working in isolation within their project – perhaps being the sole person responsible for a gardening group. Attending a course and meeting other people can provide reassurance that the way in which they are running and developing their project is appropriate to the needs of the people they serve.

Courses provide those with limited horticultural knowledge with basic gardening skills and, more importantly, teach them how to apply them in order to meet the needs of those with whom they are working. They can offer the opportunity for participants to ‘top up’ their knowledge base in a variety of areas and meet and network with others.

Individuals considering working in the field of social and therapeutic horticulture use short courses as ‘taster days’ to gain a clearer understanding of just what social and therapeutic

horticulture is all about. Many people who have joined Thrive or taken part in a short course have gone on to further training in either horticulture or occupational therapy or progressed through to the professional development certificate or diploma course in social and therapeutic horticulture that Thrive runs in partnership with Coventry University.

Training practitioners also has a knock-on effect of increasing the number of people whom Thrive seeks to support. Training trainers via the people who attend courses allows Thrive to reach and support an enormous number of people who are clients of therapeutic horticulture, who may then access for themselves Thrive's services to individual gardeners.

People attending short courses and accessing Thrive's other services are often seeking information that will support them in their work. 'How can I demonstrate to others the benefits of using horticultural or gardening activity?' is a question that regularly arises. Thrive is addressing this issue and, supported by a Community Fund grant, has commissioned a research programme to be undertaken in

partnership with Loughborough University.

The money has been awarded as part of a new programme of grant-giving to support social and health research, and will examine the benefits of horticulture as a tool for improving the quality of life of older and disabled people using in-depth case studies and group interviews. This will help Thrive to continue to promote best practice and develop quality standards, which will help raise the profile of the movement.

No one claims that social horticulture will enrich everybody's lives. Nevertheless, we do know that every day in gardening projects around the country a great many disadvantaged people are getting more out of life and making personal progress, with gardening as the catalyst.

Courses

The following is just a sample of the courses we run. Even if it is too late to book by the time you read this, do get in touch and we will be able to let you know about a future course that will meet your needs.



Down to earth: Thrive can support many individual gardeners through their courses

Project planning: where to start

North Kingston Centre, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey
Wednesday 3 July 2002

The course will look at how to set about planning a small horticultural project from enacting, maintaining and developing it. Participants will leave feeling more confident about being able to research and plan a project and look at the necessary human and financial resources to maintain and develop it. Ideas for projects will be discussed and there will be a visit to a developing demonstration garden on an allotment site.

Cultivating success

Holme Lacy College, Hereford
Tuesday 16 July 2002

The course is an ideal introduction for those practitioners new to the field of social and therapeutic horticulture. Practitioners will have the opportunity to evaluate their work and plan successful gardening activity sessions that meet the needs of the people with whom they work. The course will enable participants to:

- plan a gardening activity session which meets the needs of one or more of their service users
- identify design features which may enable service users to make wider use of the project facility
- network and exchange information with other practitioners
- take part in two practical horticultural activities and examine ways in which success and achievement can be built into such sessions.

A year-round therapeutic horticulture programme

St Martin's College, Lancaster
Monday 19 August 2002

The course will provide an opportunity for participants to enhance their theoretical knowledge and gain practical ideas to further develop programmes relevant to their project. The objectives

of the day will include:

- exploration of the underlying issues of meeting client needs through horticulture
- the opportunity to share examples of appropriate tasks and activities through the horticultural year, with particular reference to winter months
- the opportunity for participants to start planning a year-round horticultural programme relevant to the needs of their client group.

Work needs of disabled people

Bishop Burton College, Nr Hull, East Yorkshire
Monday September 2002

This short course is aimed at people seeking to develop new projects or services for people who have medium to high support requirements. The course leader for the day is Ian Pepperdine, who will relate the practical experience of the development of Shaw Trust Hartsholme Community Park Project. The course will offer a broad overview of the main consideration to be given when developing any project to serve the work needs of disabled people and look at how to give 'ownership' of the activity to the service user. The day will explore the potential, the problems and some solutions when developing a new project from scratch. It will also introduce participants to the green waste recycling scheme set up by the Shaw Trust.

Combining horticulture and crafts

Molesey Horticulture Centre, East Molesey, Surrey
Wednesday 11 September 2002

This hands-on course will look at the many horticulture project-related crafts. The day will explore the potential value of the craft activity to a range of clients and ways in which the activities can be graded. Participants will have the opportunity to undertake a range of

activities such as cane work, potpourri, dried pressed flowers, art work and decorative picture frames.

Developing a gardening activity programme

**Cannington College, Bridgwater, Somerset
Tuesday 24 September 2002**

The course is an ideal introduction for practitioners new to the field of social and therapeutic horticulture. Practitioners will have the opportunity to evaluate their work and plan successful gardening activity sessions that meet the needs of the people with whom they work. The course will enable participants to:

- plan a gardening activity session which meets the needs of one or more of their service users
- identify design features which may enable service users to make wider use of the project facility
- network and information exchange with other practitioners
- take part in two practical horticultural activities and examine ways in which success and achievement can be built into such sessions.

Course fees are £70 for Thrive members and £99 for non-members. The course listings are also available as a colourful A3 wall poster. For posters, bookings or further information, contact Sue Twigg on 0118 988 5688, email susant@thrive.org.uk or visit www.thrive.org.uk

Pavilion presents the 5th Annual Day Care conference

**What's the future in day care services?
Day care provision and the new
mental health services**

Date: Tuesday 21 January 2003
Venue: ORT House Conference Centre, Camden, London NW1

Conference themes include:

- assertive outreach in day care
- home treatment in day care
- day care staff training resulting from the NSF

Aims of the conference

This conference will:

- discuss the place of day care in current mental health policy
- give an overview of the needs of users and processes of assertive outreach and home treatment services
- show examples of innovative relationships between day care and new services including assertive outreach
- demonstrate day care reviews and their consequences
- identify the staff development needs in day care.

**For a full conference programme or further information please contact:
Pavilion, The Ironworks, Cheapside, Brighton, East Sussex BN1 4DG.
Tel 01273 623222 Fax 01273 625526 Email info@pavpub.com Visit www.pavpub.com**

10% discount off the conference rate to Life in the Day subscribers if you book before November 30 2002

