

## Report to Professional Gardener's Trust.

My name is Julia Kirkman and presently I work as a professional Horticulturalist in a 10 acre walled garden on the Castle Howard Estate, in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty known as The Howardian Hills, near York.

I am a passionate gardener, with an immense love of the great outdoors, which began in my very early years, spending countless hours with my wonderful late father outside in our garden, or in local woods and parks or exploring excitedly along the banks of the River Ouse.

I previously worked in a male prison as a Drug and Alcohol Counsellor until, in my early 30s, I came to a crossroad with regard to my career and the direction I would go. A set of circumstances, maybe fate or maybe spiritually inspired I like to think – led me to Horticultural college and retraining on the Advanced National Certificate along with other mature students who were changing direction. I loved the training and especially being amongst like-minded people, it was wonderful.

I have worked in the gardens' at Castle Howard for 6 years now and gained a vast amount of knowledge on the job. The team is small but covers a massive amount of ground and is tight knit and friendly. My early years as a counsellor and previous care work involved a lot of contact with people on a close and personal level and I suppose it was this aspect of my past employment which got me thinking about Horticultural Therapy. I love working with people in a caring setting, most especially a setting that encourages and supports growth and change. There are few things as rewarding as witnessing a person come through their emotional struggles and trauma, emerging out the other side a more rounded and whole human being. I initially heard about Horticultural Therapy whilst employed in the prison, watching inmates' engaging with staff, keeping the grounds borders' and planters' colourful and tidy. Since then I have always kept an interested eye on the growth of this emerging profession.

Although currently entirely happy, fulfilled and satisfied in my job, I am always aiming to improve my knowledge and employability. I don't like to think I will go stale mentally and for me I believe that unless I am pushing myself mentally, physically and spiritually I will fall into a rut and be unsatisfied. This is therefore why I wanted to further my qualifications and Horticultural Therapy is an excellent way of tying all of my current learning up into one package encompassing the varied job descriptors of a Horticultural Therapist.

The Society for Horticultural Therapy - known as Thrive, has been established for over 35 years and states it is the UK's leading charity using gardening to effectively change disabled peoples' lives. The charity currently has four garden projects offering numerous horticultural activities within a garden setting and the support of trained therapists. Thrive offers a variety of courses and awards in Social and Therapeutic Horticulture, each aimed at a specific group of clients.

My interest leans towards the Mental Health sector, continuing with my previous experience of work with mental health and addiction issues. Therefore the course I applied for was: *Using Social and Therapeutic Horticulture to benefit people with mental health needs.*

The cost was £270 and it took place in the superb location of Myerscough College in Lancashire on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2015. The training was mainly instructor led but interaction and sharing of experience and knowledge amongst the participants was strongly encouraged. Opportunities for networking were plentiful and hearing of others' involvement in community projects was very gratifying. The overall learning outcomes were as follows:

- To understand and know how to apply the principles and practice of social and therapeutic horticulture to benefit people who have mental health support needs
- To gain an insight into the role of a horticultural therapist working with people who have mental health support needs
- To begin to design a client centred social and therapeutic horticulture programme
- To understand the importance of assessment, monitoring, evaluation, horticultural programming and planning for garden projects and for the individuals attending a garden project.

I was fortunate and very grateful to the Chalfont Charitable Trust who awarded me £550 to cover the cost of this 2 day training qualification, as well as the Award that will cost £280 which I intend to apply for and complete in the very near future.

The course content was incredibly interesting, I find the subject deeply moving and inspiring, the completion of the course developed my understanding and encouraged me to shape a number of new beliefs. The therapeutic aims and outcomes of Green Care/Eco-therapy/Horticultural Therapy can be relatively simple to achieve. Nature in and of itself is a profoundly powerful medium for encouraging optimum well being in my opinion. The over riding impression I take away from this course is the

reaffirmation that deeply immersing nature based experiences are vital for mental, physical and spiritual well being.

That said, a well designed and defined space, garden or landscape could therefore deliver beneficial therapeutic qualities without any further human input. Imagine just sitting, quietly and still in this type of environment, the feeling of wellness and wholeness seems to wash over us instantaneously. The term Biophilia describes this connectedness with nature and was first discussed by German social psychologist Erich Seligmann Fromm (March 23, 1900 – March 18, 1980) further development of the theory is mentioned by Edward O Wilson, who states “the Biophilia hypothesis suggests that there is an instinctive bond between human beings and other living systems.” In his book, Biophilia (1984), he defines biophilia as "the urge to affiliate with other forms of life".

For me Horticultural Therapy is a continuation of this naturally occurring phenomenon, harnessing the wonderful, healing, cleansing and deeply affecting qualities of nature based activities in a way that can positively affect the human condition. The instructor demonstrates a real flair for and love of the subject that I found infectious and his methodology and teaching style suited my abilities and way of thinking perfectly.

I would love the opportunity to develop my own horticultural therapy programme in the future, within my present work environment in particular. Perhaps this will be something to aim for. Failing that I am not averse to continuing with my voluntary positions within the local community, which I find great fun and very rewarding.

Julia Kirkman  
December 2015



Me, along with some of our beautiful Delphiniums.



The 'Old Rose Garden with Gardens' House'



This years' bumper crop of strawberries for the Farm Shop (and my fridge!)