

Funding report for the Professional Gardeners Trust

Victoria Brown



I am a Student on the Professional Development Diploma in Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (PDD STH) based at Coventry University. I started this course whilst working for the charity Gardening Leave as an assistant horticultural therapist. Sadly the charity closed in December 2015, however with support from the PG trust and an award of £750 funded from the Lironi training fund held by the charity Perennial I have been able to continue with my studies.

This course is only offered at Coventry University and although it is predominantly distance learning based there is a requirement to attend teaching blocks at Coventry university, Pershore Agricultural College and Thrive, the leading UK charity providing social and therapeutic horticulture to those whose lives are touched by disability. Since starting in September 2015 I have successfully completed three of four modules and am now working on a final STH feasibility project.

I have worked as a gardener since 2000 and have gained experience working as a freelance gardener over 10 years, I am currently working part-time at the National Trust for Scotland although not in the gardens, and looking for work in South West Scotland possibly in a community garden project.

The generous PG trust Award for £750 helped to cover the cost of accommodation at Coventry, Pershore and Thrive near Reading and I am very grateful to the charity Perennial for this support.

Training involved group presentations, the first running a social and therapeutic horticulture session based on a group with learning and developmental disabilities in which peer students used role play. Our second challenge was to develop an existing project to incorporate social and therapeutic horticulture. Pershore was all about design principals, hard landscaping and considerations needed to design a therapeutic garden. I found designing a garden the most challenging part of this course, however despite being totally out of my comfort zone at first, gradually the principals of site survey, client briefs and design principals came together and I learnt to enjoy this artistic endeavour. Needless to say there is still room for improvement and I am working on adding the 'wow' factor to my designs.

At Thrive we learnt about accessible gardening, adaptive tools, goal setting, outcome measures and the management of an STH project. Skills that I hope to put into practice in the near future. I found the presentations given by visiting guests very inspiring and they happily passed on invaluable information including possible pitfalls in setting up a new project.

Throughout the course our tutors were outstanding in their help and support.