

Professional Gardener's Trust

Final Report from: Kathryn Smith

College course: RHS Principles of Horticulture Level 2

Royal Botanic Gardens of Manchester and the Northern Counties Trust for the training of northern gardeners: Award for the cost of the first year of this course £555

Course centre: Shipley College, Bradford, West Yorkshire

Dear Helen,

Finally, I have completed the first year of my training on the RHS level 2 Principles of Horticulture course at Shipley College, Bradford. I was very grateful for the Royal Botanic Gardens of Manchester and the Northern Counties Trust for funding the full cost of my course which I began in October 2016. As well as teaching me many new skills it enabled me to meet other fellow horticulturalists who were passionate about furthering their interests and careers in horticulture. I am pleased to say I was able to recommend the Professional Gardener's Trust to two other students who were interested in furthering their studies in horticulture to develop their careers which they might not have otherwise been able to access without the support of the trust.

So, it has been great to meet up with other students and college members of staff in my learning development. At the end of the course we had a trip to York Gate Garden in Adel, Leeds which is an NGS garden and runs courses in landscape design, very inspirational. Whilst I have been training I have taken the opportunity to visit the Hardy Planters Society of West Yorkshire for talks and plant auctions. I hope to take some friends along and join more of their events in the next year. I continue to volunteer at RHS Harlow Carr and enjoy being part of their team in developing the woodland areas of the garden. In June I had the chance to go to the RHS Chatsworth Flower Show which was an inspirational event to see the show gardens in such a grand setting. I even managed to 'bag' some bargains in the sell off at the end of the show. Very exciting despite the torrential rain storm! My plans for the summer are to visit the Eden Project and Lost Gardens of Heligan in Cornwall, what a treat.

In my half term report I told you of my current job working with adults with learning disabilities in horticulture at Fresh Fields Enterprises in Burnley, Lancashire. We have had a very busy and productive spring despite the erratic weather. We have grown around 150 tomato plants which are all looking healthy and coming into harvest at the moment. We have trialled growing cucumbers in the green house and vertically in the polytunnels. These too are beginning to crop nicely. Courgettes continue to grow in abundance along with pumpkins, potatoes and onions which we sell to the crop share. We also sowed beetroot successfully for the first time in troughs. As part of my training course we studied units on 'Production of outdoor vegetables and fruits' and 'The Protected Environment for plant production'. As you can see this provided me with valuable knowledge and information I could directly use in my workplace. Most of our production happens in the green house and polytunnels so this was incredibly useful for me. It was also exciting to take this back to the workplace and try out ideas. My manager Gail is very amenable to letting me go ahead with my ideas and develop new areas of production. I asked one member of staff to dismantle some old and very weed bound compost heaps and gave him some information I found on how to build a new compost heap. I am pleased to say he did a fantastic job and we now have two brilliant compost bays which are getting filled up very quickly. Skills I gained in my previous career as a teacher mean that I can enable others to develop their skills too and share some of my knowledge with them. We have two new members of staff and two new volunteer staff who have joined our team recently. I have been able to encourage them in learning new skills and sharing my knowledge with them.

In February I took my RHS exams for 'Understanding garden features, Plant selection and Planning' which I gained a pass for and I am pleased to say I was awarded a distinction for the unit on 'Understanding the choice of Establishment and Maintenance of Garden plants'. I completed my exams for the second part of the course in June and am eagerly awaiting the results. The course continues in October with 'Plant Propagation, Growth and Development'. I have enrolled on this course for the coming academic year and hope to submit an application for an award from the PGT so that I can continue my studies.

I am very grateful to the trust for their support as I feel to be gaining a great deal from my studies. The service users at Fresh Fields continue to benefit from the opportunities we provide for them and spur us on with their enthusiasm for life. As a charity enterprise we are self funded and are slowly moving forward in making improvements to provide the best we can for the adults we serve.

Many thanks once again for the financial support from the Professional Gardener's Trust as you are supporting many as you support me.

Kind Regards Kathryn Smith

I enclose an attachment of a photograph of myself working at Fresh Fields, with my team. We were particularly proud of our bean production this year!