

Report for The Professional Gardeners' Trust

Claire Kohlis



On the vineyard

I am currently employed as a full time Gardener and Vineyard Manager at Bardfield Vineyard and Great Lodge Garden, in Great Bardfield, Essex. This is a large private estate comprising of the vineyard, garden, woodland and 1,000 acres of arable farmland. Prior to my career in horticulture I worked as a lawyer in London and Dublin. A love for the outdoors, plants and gardens led to me 5 years ago embarking on a career change into horticulture. I studied a BTec horticulture course at Capel Manor College, Enfield. I then gained a traineeship at the Cambridge University Botanic Garden which gave me a fantastic start to my horticultural career.



My trusty companion at work, Vina the miniature wire haired dachshund!

I am extremely grateful to the Professional Gardeners' Trust for the Worshipful Company of Gardeners Award of £243 which I used to pay the course fee for a 2 day course with Thrive (the social and therapeutic horticulture charity) entitled 'Using Social and Therapeutic Horticulture to benefit people with mental health support needs'. I attended the course on 23rd and 24th February 2016 at Thrive's therapy garden in Battersea Park, London.



The course covered the following areas:

- Understanding the principles and practice of social and therapeutic horticulture to benefit people who have mental health support needs
- Gaining an insight into the role of a horticultural therapist working with people who have mental health support needs
- Designing a social and therapeutic horticulture programme
- Understanding the importance of assessment, monitoring, evaluation

Square foot vegetable gardening in the Herb Garden, Battersea Park

The course was mainly classroom based, however it also made great use of the access to Thrive's gardens in Battersea Park. This was a fantastic way to see the techniques and skills learnt in the classroom being put into practice. The course was very interactive and an extremely knowledgeable, experienced course tutor encouraged everyone to develop their thinking and ideas. Practical sessions also took place in the classroom, such as planting containers and taking cuttings, which provoked a lot of thought and discussion into how to carry out horticultural tasks for people with specific support needs. This course was inspiring and a fantastic follow on course to

a 1 day course I previously undertook with Thrive on 'Setting up a Social and Therapeutic Horticulture Project'. The range of course participants, from volunteers in community gardens to employees in secure mental health hospitals meant that people had the opportunity to learn from each other.

This is a new aspect to my career in horticulture and is something that I am passionate about. Since the start of my horticultural career I have been involved in a community vineyard project which was a particular help to me personally and over the years I have seen the many benefits horticulture brings to others.



Herb Garden, managed by Thrive in Battersea Park

I am at the start of setting up a therapeutic horticulture project for people with mental health support needs at my place of work, which we hope to commence in May. The opportunity to attend this course has been an enormous help in my planning for the project and understanding of the issues. The help given by the tutors at Thrive has been invaluable.