

## Growth - Social and Therapeutic Horticulture Project



### What is the project?

Gardening and growing your own food, in the garden at home, on the allotment or on a windowsill, has been proven to have many health benefits for young and old. It can be a fantastic therapy for people suffering mental ill health or those with physical disabilities, and a great way for people to come together to share knowledge and skills. Social and therapeutic horticulture helps to build confidence, improve communication and social skills, facilitate new learning and, of course, provide healthy food to enjoy. There has been a therapy garden at Ryton Organic Gardens since 1990, with

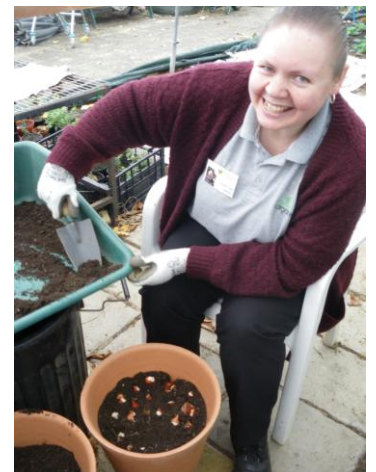
two dedicated display gardens; The Therapy Garden and The Memorial (Sensory) Garden.

### Target audience

In our organic gardens we are able to offer a safe and accessible environment for our clients, people with learning disabilities and different health and wellbeing issues, and provide a structured and appropriate work program to suit individual needs. Individuals are referred through different routes, primarily social services, or can be self-referred. Clients are allocated to a group that can accommodate their needs and they work to their personal learning goals engaging in wide-ranging gardening activities following the growing season. Activities are led by a qualified horticultural therapist. Clients can enrol for sessions in blocks of 12 weeks or for a period that suits them. The gardens have been designed to be accessible by wheelchair users.

### Key Outcomes

- Help individuals gain confidence, self-esteem, respect for others and increased independence.
- Develop client social skills through team working and interaction with others.
- Provide the opportunity for outdoor physical activity to improve both the mental health and physical fitness of clients.
- Encourage clients to take home the organic produce that they have grown to help them achieve their '5-a-day'.
- Help to reduce and recover from stress by being in the outdoors and engaging in gardening activity in the natural environment.
- Learning through practice and develop knowledge and skills in organic horticulture, employability and sustainable living.



### A typical day

The group arrive at 10am and enjoy some informal time to settle in and catch up before getting started on the activities for the day. Tasks are often short and varied to ensure continual skills development and that interest is maintained. There are regular breaks including coffee at 11am, lunch for an hour at 1pm and drinks again at 3pm. The session usually finishes at 4pm. Gardeners are encouraged to take home the harvested produce and spare plants when they are available. The group enjoy the use of a range of garden settings, inside work space, a greenhouse and a polytunnel for year round activities, whatever the weather.

## Case study

One participant, aged 31, is autistic and has epilepsy. He joined the Growth Project in 2005. He initially came with a support worker as he lacked confidence, particularly when working in large groups. After just three months, he built up his level of skills, gained more confidence and now works happily as part of a team and travels independently. He is now a very reliable and capable member of the team. "It's good exercise and the jobs are different every week" he said.



## Related projects and organisations

**Thrive**- [www.thrive.org.uk](http://www.thrive.org.uk). Thrive uses gardening to bring about positive changes in the lives of people living with disabilities or ill health, or who are isolated, disadvantaged or vulnerable.

**Martineau Gardens** - [www.martineau-gardens.org.uk](http://www.martineau-gardens.org.uk). Martineau Gardens is a garden and wildlife oasis in the centre of Birmingham, maintained mainly by volunteers with mental health conditions and learning difficulties.

**Bridewell Organic Gardens**- [www.bridewellorganicgardens.co.uk](http://www.bridewellorganicgardens.co.uk). Bridewell Organic Gardens is committed to offering worthwhile work opportunities in a therapeutic setting to people recovering from mental illness. The overall aim is that this will contribute toward re-establishing a sense of stability and greater wellbeing in gardeners who attend.



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