

THE THERAPEUTIC VALUE OF HORTICULTURE

'During the day the patients shall be employed, as much as practicable out of doors, in gardening and husbandry.

As a principle in treatment, endeavours shall be continually used to occupy the minds of the patients, and induce them to take exercise in the open air, to promote cheerfulness and happiness among them'

Dorset County Lunatic Asylum 1811

The idea of horticultural therapy springs from the Victorian asylums, which were permanent hospitals with large grounds where patients worked and grew food until the 1960s.

Since the 1990 NHS & Community Care Act, people with severe and enduring mental illness are encouraged to live in the community and most of the mental hospitals have closed. Daytime occupation is thus of vital importance to reduce boredom, loneliness and isolation.

Horticulture as a therapeutic activity is widely recognised and the national Horticultural Therapy charity (now known as 'THRIVE') was set up in 1978 to promote and encourage this.

Cherry Tree continues to promote the value of horticulture as a therapeutic activity and specifically as a means of rehabilitation for people with mental health problems. In July 1995 Cherry Tree gave the first national presentation of its work and philosophy at a National Conference on 'Gardening, Mental Health and Community Care'.

In 2005 Cherry Tree was one of twenty-four participants in a major study into the therapeutic nature of horticulture entitled 'Health, Well-being, and Social Inclusion'. A Cherry Tree volunteer wrote the introduction to this study.