

RE School partnerships with Cherry Tree Nursery

Cherry Tree Nursery is a commercial plant nursery in Northbourne. We are a registered charity and provide sheltered work to over one hundred adults with severe and enduring mental health problems. Within the space of the nursery and through work with plants, Cherry Tree aims to have an environment where volunteers can recover skills, self-esteem and mental well-being.

This year marked nineteen years since the project's early beginnings. While the provision of sheltered work rehabilitation continues to be our priority, an important part of Cherry Tree's work is to build links with the local community. Through these efforts, we hope to reduce the stigma and discrimination that is so often attached to mental illness.

Our community outreach efforts aim to promote an understanding of mental health. As a bearer of a Green Flag award within the Stour Valley Nature Reserve, we are also keen to promote ideas of sustainability and local biodiversity. We would like to inspire the local community through a greater awareness of the benefits of growing and contact with nature for physical and mental well-being and for the local environment.

Forging links with local schools has been, and continues to be, fundamental to our community outreach work. We recognise that children and young adults are increasingly experiencing mental health problems themselves, as instances of anxiety and depressive disorders and behavioural and emotional problems increase. With one in four people experiencing mental illness in their lives, young people are also increasingly likely to be in contact with people with mental health problems at home and in the community. With this, it is our concern that children and young adults may be exposed to negative perceptions and false beliefs about mental health problems. These have the potential to accentuate feelings of shame, fear and isolate them. Subsequently, we strive to increase understanding of mental illness among children and young people through on-site visits and planting activities.

Until now, Cherry Tree has principally worked with local primary schools through sessions based on our mission statement 'Caring for People, Caring for Plants'. Students have been able to participate in first hand experiences of growing and local biodiversity, some of whom are also involved in Growing Schools and Sustainable Schools initiatives. We are keen to support both national initiatives, in particular, the core themes of the Sustainable Schools agenda to 'care for oneself, for each other and the environment' and the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto. It is our hope that these visits will compliment activities in schools and contribute to a wider understanding of issues such as sustainability and healthy living.

It is with these ideas in mind that Cherry Tree would like to invite you to join the local schools that are already involved with the nursery. We welcome you to contact and visit us to discuss any activities which you would be interested for students to participate. The nursery provides use of our function room and outdoor space for visiting teachers' own learning activities. We have recently supported secondary school's art and photography projects for such purposes. Students who are pursuing horticulture at college have also been able to gain insight into the workings of a

commercial nursery. A DVD about the people at Cherry Tree and the project is available and we will be very happy to provide this for students before their visit.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely
Cherry Tree Nursery