

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2012

“People need to be given the hope that it is perfectly possible to live a fulfilling life after a diagnosis of mental illness”. This quote from the recently published Schizophrenia Commission Report encapsulates what Cherry Tree is here for, and covers all the many varying forms mental illness can take. Thank you from all of us to all of you who continue to help, support and make possible this service which becomes ever more vital in this increasingly cruel and divided world.

Cherry Tree has now reached its twenty-second year, thanks to the dedicated hard work of many. 2012 was the year when we received Royal Approval in the form of a visit from HRH The Princess Royal, who came in March to open our marvellous new volunteers’ tearoom. It was a very special day for our volunteers, as she shook each one by the hand and spoke to them personally. This did wonders for their self-esteem, and also marked a positive recognition of mental illness, so often neglected and stigmatised. 245 people signed our visitors’ book that day, and heard the Princess say “this must be the tidiest plant nursery in the country”. The very special day left us wondering where we can go next. As one of the volunteers commented afterwards, “I have now, at Cherry Tree, met and had conversations with, among others, the Minister of Health, seven Members of Parliament, the High Sheriff and the Lord Lieutenant of Dorset, a Baroness and a Princess”. Particular thanks to Ewa Beasley for taking charge of security on this day. The very welcome publicity generated by the event led to us having our most successful Plant Sale ever at the end of March, with the nursery literally overflowing with people.

The year started with winter work aimed at making the nursery safe for everyone, with paths being re-laid, damaged tunnel covers replaced, and a new standing-out area created. Following the news of the Princess’s forthcoming visit we moved into tidying mode. Thanks to very generous donations from Norman, son of our founder Rev Canon Roslyn Aish, from J P Morgan, and from the local councillors’s ward improvement fund, we were able to lay fresh gravel and slabs, and, the highlight, the lovely ramp outside the office.

The weather has not been kind to horticulture this year. The greatest problem it caused for us was having to cancel our Annual Open Day and Summer Plant Sale at the very last minute due to the Council declaring Vicarage Field to be waterlogged. Although we did our best, offering plant sale prices for the whole of the following week, an idea we repeated in October, we have not been able to recoup the loss of income from all our visitors at this time.

This was very disappointing for us, as donations are increasingly hard to find. The Charities Aid Foundation and the NCVO reported very recently that donations to charity fell by 20% during 2011-12. “The drop in giving is deeply worrying” combined with public spending cuts it represents a potentially severe blow for many charities”, commented John Low, the Chief Executive of the CAF. This makes our new offices a project for the future rather than the present, as we must prioritise covering our running costs.

We are determined to be as self-sustaining as possible, and are constantly trying to change our production to meet public demand. We are now growing more roses, trees, vegetable plants, fruit bushes and herbs, and continue to look for new varieties. We have also taken a big step, and asked for and been given permission by Bournemouth Borough Council to open on Sundays next year. We hope this will be helpful to our customers and also to us! The

Sunday openings from 10am to 3pm will be trialled initially from our March Plant Sale until our July Plant Sale.

Fortunately our October Plant Sale was also another record-breaking event for the time of year, helped greatly by the generosity of the Rotary Clubs of Bournemouth North and Westbourne, who provided a delicious barbecue for our guests and workers.

We have lost some dearly loved friends this year. We had a wonderful celebration of the life of Tim Boswell, who we lost at the end of 2011. Then we lost our dear Bob Algar, and in May were shocked and saddened by the sudden death of Sue Tourle. Additionally, Cherry the cat passed away in the winter at the age of 19, and Jake the dog later in the year. We remember them all very fondly.

Volunteer numbers are higher than ever, we have 160 people on our books, and have had around 100 referrals over the course of the year. Four volunteers got a job this year, which is especially remarkable at a time of such high unemployment. The pressure on them from agencies such as the infamous ATOS is relentless, and puts their mental stability at risk. We have regular visits from Job Centre staff to try to reassure volunteers, and have for a while benefited from a drop-in clinic from the Knightstone Housing Association.

The annual Harry Roffey Day trip was to Hestercombe Gardens this year, which marked the 20th anniversary of the visit from the Rotary Club of Château Gontier to pay for our irrigation system, which was largely arranged by Harry. We have now put up a special plaque in his memory.

Volunteers are thoroughly enjoying our new regular Healthy Eating and Cooking on a Budget courses, and wonderful smells come out of the kitchen on those days. Many thanks to Annie Newbury and the Dorset Food and Health Trust. The wonderful Sue Cheeseman and Diana Guy continue to run their classes too. June Perryman retired as CAB Adviser this year, but fortunately remains with us as a Trustee. Her replacement, Tish Borrowman, is excellent, and is helping us set up a special debt advisory service, which is so badly needed in these hard times. The link between debt and mental illness is proven, and, as the gap between rich and poor widens, our volunteers actively collect for the Food Bank, which shockingly is becoming more and more needed.

The annual caravan holiday to Weymouth was its usual success, and the volunteers want to go to Bognor next year! There was no camping trip this year, but instead volunteers had a special day in the New Forest involving porridge, cream tea and a barbecue. Other visits have included Monkey World . courtesy of the Princess Trust, Kingston Lacy House, Hengistbury Head, Durmast House, Furzey Gardens and many others. Catherine Marshall held another of her herbal workshops, and, thanks to the World Development Movement, volunteers thoroughly enjoyed a fantastic programme of talks and events at One World Week. Our friends from the Nationwide Marketing Department cooked a delicious Valentine's Day lunch, as well as helping with weeding and the annual barbecue with Chestnut Nursery, our sister project. HSBC also came to help with the weeding. Thanks to all of them.

Volunteers Ted and Brian both retired this year . we wish them both well. We were joined by marketing student Amy over the summer. This year's calendar and card were both designed by talented volunteer Peter, who also produced this newsletter. The painting on the card is by Trevor. Volunteers are looking forward to visiting the reindeer at Stewarts and to participating

in the Santa Fun Run. They have invited Chestnut volunteers to join them not only for our annual quiz, but also for singing around the piano.

In order to introduce volunteers to other local groups, we have started inviting them here for tea. Volunteers have in this way joined Women in Mind and our great recent success is the Kinson Knitting and Crochet group, with half the nursery now producing squares for blankets for Africa!

The amazing Bolivia group have now finished raising the money to provide safe clean water for their eighth community. Quaker Bolivia Link held their Trustees meeting here in July, and invited volunteers to join them; it was a great pleasure to show them the Nursery and to hear that the Cherry Tree Bolivia group is the major funder of QBL UK!

We were pleased to have the opportunity to host a very well-attended meeting of the Dorset Land Network. With more and more services closing, and with the wider recognition of the benefits of the natural world for enhancing mental well-being, increasing numbers of land-based community projects are being set up. The network hopes to promote links between all these groups, for mutual advice and support.

2012 was a very good year for frogs. There were more of them than ever in our wildlife pond, and all the frogspawn hatched. The year also saw the very welcome return of adult toads to the nursery . the first time for six years. Grass snakes were also plentiful in the pond. We saw far more jays than usual, probably because they were having to travel further to get food. Numbers of birds, butterflies and bees were down due to the weather and the lack of nectar, although red admiral numbers were good, and brimstones were still here in October. We have had foxes in the nursery for a good part of the year, and fox cubs playing in the stock bed.

We were shortlisted again for the Wessex Charity Awards, which gave ten lucky people the opportunity to attend the Charity Gala dinner in Winchester. The organiser, Jenny Warner, is a great friend of many of the volunteers and came on a special visit soon afterwards. We also won another award from Bournemouth in Bloom for the garden maintained by a volunteer, and the Ellingham Show Nurseries Cup yet again. We had plant stalls at events which included the Stanbridge Mill Open Day, the Bournemouth Family Festival, and special plant sales events at JP Morgan.

There have been plenty staff changes this year. Sarah Giles came here for three months preparatory to going to Chestnut Nursery, when she swapped with Jez Norris, who joined us as our highly popular Horticultural Assistant. Lisa-Marie Barrett went on extended leave and was replaced by St John Mauger and Ray Alderton who share the job, and whose combination of skills is ideal for the post.

The nursery now has its own artist in residence, the very talented Trevann Fanthorp. We also have our own wildlife artist, Pam Shrubbs, who is preparing a wildlife board for our pond. Our friend Helga Aldersey opened her fascinating garden in aid of Cherry Tree again. We were pleased to welcome Paul Sly, the new Chief Executive of the Dorset HealthCare University Foundation Trust, to the site.

Current winter projects have been funded by the Gardening for the Disabled Trust and a friend of the project. We are erecting a donated polytunnel to enable us to produce more plants for early sales, and are constructing more display benches for our Sales Area. We are planning a

Special Christmas Shopping week for the first week in December, featuring fairly and ethically traded products, as we are now on the Bournemouth Borough Council Fair Trade Committee!

Figures show that depression is the biggest single cause of disability in the Western world, and that more than a million people in the UK are unable to work because of mental disorders, while stress affects 1 in 5 of the working population. An international study published recently shows that the stigma of mental health is worse than the illness, and that sufferers are shunned, taunted and abused. Three quarters of the people interviewed said they had been ostracised by other people because of their illness. This shows what a difference projects like Cherry Tree can make, and indeed how important they are.

The report of the Schizophrenia Commission, *The Abandoned Illness*, mentioned at the start of this newsletter, shows what a long way we have to go. Of the 220,000 people in England diagnosed as having schizophrenia, only 8% are in employment. The report states *Each of the patients diagnosed with the illness in the UK costs £36,000 to treat, yet is cared for on in-patient wards where violence and sexual harassment are endemic, increasingly treated against their will, prescribed excessive levels of drugs, denied talking therapies and condemned to a life of unemployment and poverty.*

But it does not need to be this way. The report reflects on the success of the Aids Campaign, *What Britain needs is a similar campaign on mental health, to end stigma and discrimination . and grant the patients the care they deserve.*

We would like once again to send our heartfelt thanks to all of those who continue to help and support our work. There is unfortunately not room in this newsletter to mention you all but 2012 has not been an easy year and we need and love you all. Particular thanks must go to our amazing catering team, to all our dedicated friends, and to our wonderful volunteers. Cherry Tree has grown and developed as the loving supportive family community we all need and deserve, and it is the amazing spirit of our volunteers that has enabled it to do so.

Cherry Tree places great emphasis on the importance of restoring dignity. *No amount of money can buy dignity, because to be a person with dignity you must recognise the humanity of others. No one can be a complete person on their own, without others.*

“Only with dignity and love can you confront fear and violence.”

Our love and thanks to you all, and good wishes for a peaceful 2013.