

CHERRY TREE NURSERY OPEN DAY NEWS 2013

We would like to welcome all our friends and supporters to Cherry Tree's three Annual Open Days for 2013, and to take the opportunity to thank everyone who has, in their own way, contributed towards this much-needed project still being respected, vibrant and life-changing after twenty-three years. We are also very happy to welcome all those visitors who are new to our project, we hope you will like what you see and want to learn more.

Cherry Tree combines promoting mental well-being with love of the natural world, offering a haven to those in distress, along with the opportunity to achieve purpose and meaning and to have a dignified life.

If 2012 was the year of the visit of HRH The Princess Royal, then 2013 must be the year of Phase 2 of the Sustainable Building Programme. Last year we did not believe this to be achievable, but this year we determined it would be, and our friends from the Dorset Centre for Rural Skills started work in April on the exciting new extension which will provide us with a new Quiet Room, Training Room, Disability Rights Advice Room, Private Conversation or Meeting Room, a room for volunteers to do office work in, and our long-dreamed of Library. At last volunteers will have the spaces they deserve in which to work, learn and recover.

We apologise sincerely for any disruption the building works may cause, but happily, because the work is taking place in a corner of the site, the disturbance will be kept to a minimum. We extend our profound gratitude to all the individuals and organisations who made this possible. Our new offices, which will be Phase 3 of the Sustainable Building Programme, remain a dream for the future.

The weather over the last few years has not been good for plant growers, and many nurseries are struggling. Considering this, our plant sales have held up relatively well. We have had a very good May and we thank all our customers for continuing to visit us. One casualty of the weather was the March Plant Sale, usually the most successful of the year, which was drastically reduced due to lack of parking, Vicarage Field being too wet to use. This followed the enforced cancellation of last year's Open Day for the same reason. Our three plant sale days are our major fundraising events of the year, and the loss of two of them in the course of a year is a matter of great concern.

Our new Sunday opening has been a great success, meaning we are now open seven days a week, and we will continue to open on Sundays between 10 am and 3 pm until October. This also gives visitors an opportunity to have a free cup of tea or coffee in our new volunteers' tearoom.

Over the course of the winter months, volunteers and staff worked hard to erect a donated twin span polytunnel to provide more room for early production and winter protection. We are now growing our own roses, and are happy to report much increased sales of vegetable plants, herbs, fruit bushes and fruit trees, as people are trying to produce more of their own food. We are continuing to expand the number of varieties of perennials, alpines and trees we have available in response to customers' demands.

A first for Cherry Tree for 2013 was the opening of Highwood Gardens at Charborough Park in aid of our project on Bank Holiday Monday, by kind permission of our patron Richard Drax. We were able to sell plants along with tea and cake. We would also like to thank renowned plantswoman, Helga Aldersey, for opening her lovely garden in Talbot Woods in aid of Cherry Tree.

We are grateful to Nationwide and JP Morgan Chase for selling our plants at their business premises, and Forge Garage for taking our plants to Winton Carnival. The Nursery has been fortunate to be chosen as Charity of the Year by the Centre for Wessex Young Musicians. We would like to draw to your attention to their forthcoming performances at the Nursery, with string orchestras on Saturday 13 July and the Wessex Fanfare for wind instruments on Sunday 21 July, both starting at 11 am. We are also the Charity of the Year chosen by the Knighton Heath Golf Club, Dorset Golf & Country Club.

The Victoria Park Drama Society very kindly put on a performance in aid of Cherry Tree earlier this year. The event was a great success and provided us with a generous donation. Many thanks also to Christopher Baker for doing a Skydive in aid of Cherry Tree, and to his father, Peter Baker, for helping to raise a considerable amount in sponsorship. We really appreciate the support of so many of you who have contributed to our work. Finally we would like to pass on our thanks to all who helped us replace our plant delivery van, which was no longer adequate for our needs.

In April, we celebrated our 23rd birthday with a barbecue generously provided by the Rotary Clubs of Bournemouth North and Westbourne. The event was crowned by the unveiling of a Wildlife Board especially painted for us by talented local artist Pam Shrubbs, to illustrate the species seen around our Wildlife Pond.

We are happy to report that two successive batches of frogspawn successfully hatched in the wildlife pond, where there are plenty of baby newts and water spiders. Butterflies appeared late this year, but quite a few seem to have survived the winter. We have seen orange tips, tortoiseshells, speckled woods, brimstones, red admirals, peacocks and cabbage whites, as well as magpie moths, and an unusual sighting was a large bee fly, which is a fascinating insect.

It is pleasing to report an increase in sparrow and starling numbers. We have seen lesser spotted woodpeckers, blackcaps, coal tits, long-tailed tits, bluetits, chiffchaffs, siskins, goldfinches and bullfinches among others, and two robins have nested in the barn. We believe we also saw a red kite. Other raptors visiting include kestrels, sparrowhawks in winter, regular buzzards and a possible peregrine.

There are currently 160 people on our books. Many of them live in Bournemouth but some come from Dorset, Poole or Hampshire. They can stay for as long as they wish and need: ± only came for a week and sixteen years later I am still here! Over the last year five volunteers have moved on to paid work, three to voluntary work and one to training. Other volunteers have had success in exams such as Maths, English and Computing.

We are pleased to report that the number of courses we have on offer continues to increase. Our dear friend Diana Guy has just completed a very popular course on trees, which involved visits to identify trees in Canford Arboretum, Furzey Gardens and

Bournemouth Gardens. Our wonderful courses on Healthy Eating, and Cooking on a Budget continue to prove invaluable, many thanks to the Dorset Food and Health Trust.

The fantastic Sue Cheeseman continues to teach Literacy, Numeracy, and English with the use of computers. Our Disability Rights Adviser, Tish Borrowman, has now completed her first year with us and her expertise in debt advice has proved invaluable. Thanks also to the Jobcentre Plus staff for visiting on a regular basis to provide reassurance and support.

The annual Cherry Tree volunteers caravan holiday ventured further afield this year, and a break in Chichester was thoroughly enjoyed. The annual boat trips have now started, and other places visited in 2013 include Poole Museum, Moors Valley Country Park, Abbotsbury Swannery for a sponsored walk, and a mystery tour of Dorset.

A lovely new addition to the services Cherry Tree provides is the Knitting Group, and many blankets and items of children's clothing have gone to Africa. Next winter we will be starting a Sewing Group so people can learn to take up their jeans and sew on buttons. Another forthcoming training event, to take place, once the busy horticultural season is over, is a week-long stonemasonry course.

After twenty-three years we now seem to lose people we love every year. Since the last Open Day, Anne Southwood, Peter Wade and Twinkle, the cat, have all passed on. Anne is greatly missed in the propagation unit, and Peter is missed by everyone everywhere. Twinkle has now joined our original cat, Cherry, by the pond, and our two new cats, Magic and Maisie, are taking on mouse-deterrent duties. As we now have so many people to remember, we have established a new annual event The Day of Celebration and Remembering which will be a festival to be held on November 1st when we can all join together in memory of our friends.

We are very proud of the fact our volunteers, as well as having now provided seven Bolivian communities and one in Ecuador with life-giving safe water supplies, are active supporters of the local Food Bank. Following the news that half a million people now depend on Food Banks, a Joint Report by Oxfam and Church Action on Poverty says that cuts to welfare payments including below-inflation rises in benefits, new Job Seekers Allowance sanctions and the re-assessment of entitlement to Invalidity Benefit are the biggest cause of the surge in demand for Food Banks in all parts of the Country (1)

The results of our 2012-13 Evaluation Survey, which took the form of a consultation, have been analysed by ex-volunteer, Matthew Israel, revealing that of the fifty Cherry Tree volunteers interviewed about how they feel when they are at the nursery, 100% feel safe, 100% feel part of a community, and 100% feel that they are cared about. 96% feel that following attending, they now help or could help others, and 82% feel their motivation has improved. 72% said they would not change anything about Cherry Tree. These results provide further justification for the community and family that Cherry Tree provides, not only for our volunteers, but also for many of our friends and associates.

We greatly value the close relationship we have with the staff of Bournemouth Borough Council Parks Department. We are pleased to be part of the new developments at Hengistbury Head and involved with the wildlife garden there, and are looking forward to the arrival of White Park cattle in the fields around the Nursery. Volunteers have requested

more information about these cattle and an updated tour of the Stour Valley Nature Reserve.

At the suggestion of one of our Trustees, a Fundraising Committee has been set up. One of the priorities this committee has highlighted is the need to promote ourselves more in the community. We are receiving a growing number of requests for talks from community groups, and a number of friends and volunteers are to have training in how to do this. We have also recruited help for developing our Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/cherrytreenursery) from students at Bournemouth Arts Institute and Canford School. Our video . now very old, but still full of power and meaning . is now available on youtube and on our website (www.cherrytreenursery.org.uk) and we are fundraising to produce a new version. More help with fundraising and promotion is always needed!

A recent national survey by the Charities Aid Foundation has revealed that one in six charities face closure in the coming year amidst public spending cutbacks and falling donations from the public. Nearly half of charities are being forced to dig into their reserves in order to maintain their work, and one in three are being forced to cut services or jobs. These are difficult times for fundraising, and we are so immensely grateful to all of you for the help and support that you give us.

The mentally ill are one of the most vulnerable groups in society and the least able to defend themselves against cruelty and neglect. We know from the growing number of enquiries and referrals we receive that the need for our project is greater than ever. We are also acutely aware of the direct impact the policies of austerity are having on the number of people developing and experiencing mental ill health. More and more projects and services are closing, being cut, or having their staffing reduced. We see on a daily basis the consequences of the cuts being made to benefits, the ending of Disability Living Allowance, the widely-vilified Bedroom Tax, the cuts in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, the ending of the Crisis Loan and the Community Care Grant.

It is deeply regrettable that media campaigns against benefit scroungers have led to a marked increase in the stigmatisation of those who, for reasons of illness, are unable to compete in the open job market. A report has been published about how benefit claimants are now seen as otherq. less than fully human .. a distinct separate social groupq (2) People surviving on benefits are demonised, criminalized and vilified. An integral and essential part of Cherry Treeq work is to counter this stigmatisation and the discrimination it brings. This makes our presence as a community resource, and our work with neighbourhood groups, more important than ever.

We have three volunteers who were recently made unemployed when Dorset Enterprises closed. All of this means that meaningful and rewarding voluntary work is increasingly more important. It is only by loving and supporting each other that we have any hope of survival.

This is yet another reason why Cherry Tree can never close, and why we can never adequately thank all the individuals, groups and organisations who have contributed to our continuing work. Thank you very much to all of you who have helped in whatever way. Cherry Tree tries to give out positive messages of hope at all times, and the loving and

supportive atmosphere created by our volunteers is the basis of all our work. We send our especial love and thanks to our volunteers who are a daily inspiration.

Cherry Tree Nursery is the jewel in the crown of Bournemouth. Lord Shaftesbury

Where else can you experience unconditional love on a daily basis? a volunteer

Be still and listen, the earth is singing

- 1 Independent 30 May
- 2 The Guardian 11 May 2013