

"I have been attending Cherry Tree for 9 years and it has saved my life. I was like a broken jigsaw puzzle. When I arrived and with the love, support and understanding of the staff and volunteers, they began putting me back together again. I have also had the privilege to witness Cherry Tree saving other people's lives. Cherry Tree gives you an enormous sense of security. Having spent time away because of surgery, knowing that Cherry Tree was there to go back to assisted very powerfully in my healing. I can honestly say I don't know what I would do without Cherry Tree – quite simply it saves lives." JC



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This booklet has been produced in memory of Sue Tourle, so we start with her contribution:

"I first came to know about Cherry Tree Nursery approximately twenty years ago. I worked as Deputy Manager for one of the group homes for people with mental health issues. I introduced S to the idea of attending after I had got to know him quite well as a resident of the group home. He has been attending ever since and has been helped immeasurably by the care, love, support, understanding and practical help that Cherry Tree affords to everyone. My interest in Cherry Tree has never wavered and right from my first introduction here, I have wanted to be a part of it. I even applied for jobs here! In Oct 2010 I had to have foot/ankle surgery which ended up becoming far more complicated than it should have and I ended up being unable to go back to work. I had to apply for benefits and was already caring for a very poorly husband who can't work. When people say that they 'hit rock bottom' I previously hadn't any idea what they meant. I sat in my garden, phoned my sister and told her that I was going to kill myself. She persuaded me to see my GP eventually, and he said the magic words 'have you thought about voluntary work?'

Hence, I begged Jess to let me become 'a friend' and I have never looked back. I have since become a volunteer. Firstly CT gave me a purpose and a focus. Something to get out of bed for. A feeling of being useful and wanted. Secondly it gave me a shape to my days. The weeks and days had all been revolving around hospitals and doctors. Now I have something else to talk about AND it's something I love.

Thirdly, Cherry Tree understands me. I'm allowed to actually be myself here, without having to say why. I can be sad and left alone or sad and have a chat with someone.

Fourthly, how did I ever get through any of my life without some of the friendships that I've made here? Wonderful, understanding, caring people. The sense of community, family, belonging stays with me wherever I am.

The personal help I've received from June Perryman of the CAB is invaluable and I can't bear to think where I'd be now, without it.

If Cherry Tree has helped me this much I know without question, that every volunteer here is afforded the same amount of love, care, attention and support that I am. Thank you never seems enough." ST



"Cherry Tree would probably come near the top of the list of rescue organisations for anyone coming under its spell.

The sharing and caring which supports us comes from volunteers, friends and staff in equal measures.

There are opportunities to share flippant, light-hearted chats over a cup of tea – true friendship groups. Similarly everyone has experience of medical social and domestic traumas and can offer firsthand advice. Everybody knows something or someone who can cheer you, hold a serious debate or simply sit in quiet contemplation.

Knowledge of both horticulture and business with all its facets are just enormous – everyone seems to have a hidden gem of knowledge and skills.

The site is an oxymoron of peace, tranquillity and a hive of activity simultaneously. Come rain or shine, heat-wave or ice, the natural surroundings and regimented displays touch one's entire being on each and every visit.

"It was luck which brought me here, traumas and crises which keeps me here and it is a personal haven of joy which I am proud and privileged to belong to." AM

"A Shrub Nursery grows plants and then the van driver delivers the plants. Here at Cherry Tree Nursery plants are not the only thing that's grown and plants are not the only thing delivered.

Cherry Tree Nursery provides 'Hope and Purpose' in a safe and tranquil working environment for people who struggle to live with their mental illness as well as trying to live an every day life in the wider community.

Living with a mental illness can be a very scary and lonely place without support and everyday tasks like eating, washing, going to supermarket or local shop for a pint of milk or even choosing what to wear all become impossible.

'Time' is the most important thing that Cherry Tree delivers, giving people space to recover, adjust and learn their self-esteem, in which they grow and blossom into a much loved person, not only by other people, but more importantly 'Themselves'! I believe I would not be alive today if I had not found Cherry Tree Nursery 11 years ago. It has taken a long time for me to get to loving myself and actually feeling like I belong in this Wide Community, gaining confidence and self-esteem and this would not have been possible without the support and time delivered from Cherry Tree Nursery." SH

"To me Cherry Tree is my sanctuary, my place to be me and a place where I know I'm not alone, thought to be odd or feel judged. I have been coming here for 8 years, although it is often difficult for me to go places or be away from home, I feel safe here. The staff and volunteers are like extended family. Over the years Cherry Tree and the people here have got me through so much and supported me, kept me going when I've often wanted to give up.

In a way it is its own magical microcosm filled with love, beauty, the wonders of nature, support and encouragement as well as great friendship. Without Cherry Tree I and many others would be lost and adrift. If I had to describe Cherry Tree in one sentence it would be a beautiful island of love, life and sanctuary in the often rough and stormy seas of life." SD



"I came to Cherry Tree Nursery fourteen years ago. I was anxious and depressed. Months passed me by before I started to feel better in myself. I enjoyed working in the shop. I got to meet other people and formed friendships which made life easier.

I enjoyed many days out with the Nursery and got to visit places I would not have been. I joined the Management Meetings and I volunteered myself to take the minutes at each meeting. I also got involved with the Bolivia group and helped to raise money to get water installed for the many communities in desperate need for clean running water.

I enjoy coming to Cherry Tree Nursery to see my friends and for the support which is important to me." PL

"Where else can you experience unconditional love on a daily basis" AV

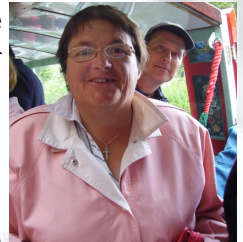
"After years of short-lasting jobs in the outside world, I discovered Cherry Tree Nursery in the Plant Finder and wrote to them. To my delight I received a reply and as I was currently seeing a psychiatrist, my social worker referred me. After a few months wait I was coming here. After twelve years I am still attending Cherry Tree Nursery. This place has given me my life back. There is always something needing doing and someone to talk to or who needs a chat.

In the environment of plants, life feels less pressurised and peaceful.

There is also a cat here, who is getting older, and also Jake who is Trevor's dog. It will be sad when Jake's time comes to an end, as he has been part of our lives here for so long.

Its lovely to be a part of helping the Nursery to continue producing good plants and to support other people.

My working life is nearing retirement years, but I think as long as I feel able I shall come and put some time in, and enjoy the happy atmosphere of Cherry Tree Nursery." VL



"I first came to Cherry Tree Nursery in late February, early March 2001. At the time I was homeless, but knew about SWOP starting in 1989/90.

SWOP is a lifeline for myself as it keeps my head above water and keeps me occupied and has also given me some more skills of which I keep learning." KM

"Lovely people, lovely environment, immersed in plantsa place to grow in trust, strength and confidence in all ways. " NN

"Despite my problems, SWOP is a lovely place, and I was having problems all over the place, and so were some of my family and friends so I came here to see my friends to be got well. Things had been getting steadily worse over the past six months although they were bad before. The psychiatric services had got me completely wrongly diagnosed and wouldn't listen to the few better psychiatrists who were more right about me. So all in all I need SWOP to chill out in." BC

Dear Sheila

I recently had a conversation with Jess at Cherry Tree Nursery. She mentioned to me that you were interested to hear of volunteers' experiences at Cherry Tree. I offered to relate my experience to you to inform you of what Cherry Tree means to me. I have been attending Cherry Tree seven years now and for me its like coming home. When I first came to Cherry Tree Nursery I had severe anxiety and depression and had no structure to my day which did not help. I felt isolated and alone and had no purpose or meaning to my life.

Seven years on my self-esteem has grown along with my confidence too and I have many new friends who I treasure dearly. Someone once told me many years ago that because of my traumatic past I needed to have as many positive experiences in my future life to make life brighter for me. Well I can honestly say that Cherry Tree Nursery has made that possible. I have had many positive experiences in the seven years I have been here. Lovely days out having a social life that I did not have and experiencing unconditional love from the staff who work here especially Jess. We are all one big family and support one another whatever the problem. We have good days and bad days but the bad days are more bearable with the support from staff and friends. I started off in the prop unit with Trevor then worked outdoors in the open air pruning the plants. I have also done potting on. I am proud of what I have achieved at the nursery and my writing skills have also improved.

Before coming to Cherry Tree I felt great conflict within myself regarding giving money to charities. My experience was having tins rattled at me in the streets which made me become very resentful. What Cherry Tree did for me in this regard was time to work through my feelings on this matter. It also gave me permission to decide for myself. Charities I wanted to give to, this was a very powerful experience for me. The right to choose for oneself without being pressurised by external forces.

I joined the Bolivia group in my early days at Cherry Tree. It had a very profound effect on me, it changed my perception. I decided I wanted to help the people in these communities in Bolivia who had no clean water and their children were dying of diseases before they reached the school age of five. I noticed after a few months that I was feeling a deep sense of joy knowing that this would have a profound effect on the communities we were giving to and this made me feel good. I believe true giving from the heart is a very good thing to do. It benefits the giver and the receiver equally.

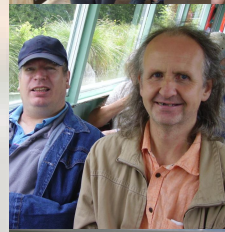
Yours sincerely

EF

because I didn't understand the system.

The Tea Room, officially opened by Princess Anne, and rest and recreational area, is the centre of social life. Many of my friends meet there and have a chat. The atmosphere encourages us to care for one another, and feel important, valued, needed, loved and respected. The Tea Room is a lovely building that is cosy and warm. It has notice boards that publicise social activities, outings, visits, and help lines, which enable us to become more independent and broaden our outlook. Its got some lovely paintings on the wall with titles like "Life is full of good things", "The strength of kindness" and "Look for colour in the darkness".

I've enjoyed writing this article. It makes me realise how lucky I am to be a part of Cherry Tree Nursery." AK



"I have been at Cherry Tree Nursery for 15-16 years now and the nursery has helped me tremendously. It has kept me out of hospital and I have made some close friends here, who mean a lot to me.

When I first came to the nursery I was very thin, as my O.C.D has greatly improved now although there have been times at the nursery when I have been quite bad, but the support from the people here has got me through it.

The nursery has a nice relaxed atmosphere, as well as being a safe and supportive environment and I am very happy here." PC

"Cherry Tree is a lifeline. After I left school – I did not know what to do. Since I attended Cherry Tree my confidence has increased, I am more outgoing, everybody respects me – I feel part of a community and I feel secure about my future." MD

“Cherry Tree or SWOP (Sheltered Work Opportunities Project) is a registered charity. It is more than just a work place, it's a whole community or big family, with plenty of activities and involvement for volunteers, that is, those suffering from mental illness. SWOP has received many awards, such as “The Lilly Reintegration Award Recognising Outstanding Achievement in Mental Health” in 2004 and “The Charity of the Year”, by Dorset Business Awards 2009.

It aims to fill up the great need for meaningful occupation in a supportive and pressure free environment, and to use the therapeutic nature of horticulture to restore mental well-being. It gives security, confidence and stability to its workers.

Staff and volunteers work together in a very supportive way. Work boosts self-esteem and confidence providing companionship and mutual support and helping to dispel boredom and loneliness and restore dignity. Cherry Tree has over 100 volunteers on 4.5 acres. The nursery produces over 90,000 finished plants, 100,000 liners, 125,000 cuttings and 1,000 specimen-sized plants annually. Needless to say, most volunteers work with plants, but I work in the office. I am amazed at the amount of mail and correspondence the nursery has. It keeps contact with hundreds and hundreds of people, or friends, some of whom live abroad!

There are high costs in running such a concern, so the nursery will always rely heavily on fund raising for donations, in order to continue the unique and special project. Nevertheless plant sales are very successful. On March 31st 2012, the plant sale raised £17,474.79 in just one day – the most successful plant sale ever!

At the end of 2004 a Cherry Tree management meeting asked about the possibility of helping or raising funds for a 3rd World Community, with the fundamental belief to provide water where it is most needed. Cherry Tree chose Bolivia, which has the highest level of rural poverty in the world. £40,000 was raised and has supplied seven communities with safe clean water. The first three served 84 families, 277 adults and 600 children. This was done by selling books, videos, homemade cakes, raffles, tombola, sponsored walk and appeals. Families are no longer forced to drink contaminated water. Cherry Tree has found it enlightening to look outside ourselves and give to even needier people, which in turn helps us towards our recovery.

Cherry Tree offers a wide range of support, including literacy, numeracy and computer classes. There is a Community Psychiatric Nurse, for those who need her, and a lady who comes from Poole CAB. She is excellent, and knows how to help with any problems or benefits. I could not have done without her,

“A friendly place free from petty jealousy. A place where friends, volunteers, staff and customers treat others with respect and kindness. One of the best places to put a smile on my face, and whenever possible on the faces of others.

A happy place which brings the best out of me and others.” IC

“The sweet smell of Cherry Tree

for all of us in its care

returning our love for these plants

we help to work grown and share.

This experience of nature these flowers for all of our health.

Our wish to give love peace the fellowship of teamwork.

A passion for sweet dreams and mystical roses centred round the gardens of wealth.

For we all flourish at different times and levels to some degree

This search in our world of natural beauty

The power of the free

Thank you Cherry Tree for our balanced lifestyle we all feel here. The friends we make the old and new so happy to share this road with you. Our destinies ablaze with new knowledge and the awareness of a deeper meaning to our lives awaken the inner gardener in all of us.” DN

“Cherry Tree has played a very important role

in helping me come to terms with my mental health. When I am struggling with a depressive episode, the structure that Cherry Tree provides me with each day, helping me get up in the mornings is vital to my recovery.

My family feel reassured in the knowledge that I am in a very safe and nurturing environment.

Gradually as my health improves the skills I thought had been lost are once again recognised, for example attending management meetings, helping with school visits.

I would like to say a big thank you to all the staff, friends and volunteers for being there.” AP



Don't forget to catch me before I fall

I am going to take you on a journey, my journey to Cherry Tree.

It started on a very bleak day for me. I had this big cloud over me and I felt I was in a big black hole I was unable to climb out of. I got on a bus and went into Bournemouth. When I got off the bus in Bournemouth Square, I could hear someone singing. I was drawn towards the music and saw this lovely lady with a big beaming smile and a big voice to go with the singing. The words she sang meant something to me and I was hypnotised by the music. I bought a CD from her and then wandered around the shops.

I saw the video of *The Wizard of Oz* on a shelf. It made me think. I did not buy the video but went to another shop and bought the CD, *'Somewhere Over the Rainbow'*. Armed with my music I went home a bit happier.

At home I would play my music when I was feeling low. The music became my friend. On the CD *'Love Is All'* I had this lovely lady with a big smile looking at me. Just looking at her picture and that big smile made me feel a lot better. When I played the CD, *'Somewhere Over the Rainbow, way up high is a land that I heard of once in a lullaby'*. A story about a girl in a special place who met some special friends and they were looking for a heart. I would go to my window and look out searching for the rainbow and that special place. I searched and searched but there was no rainbow so I threw the CD in the dustbin.

After spending some time in hospital, I went home. In Kinson I found that rainbow, that special place and the heart, Cherry Tree Nursery. It was the people there. They were all so nice. The Trustees, people who made donations and anyone involved in Cherry Tree, especially the staff. Also the customers were so warming and friendly. What was so special to me was that all these people wanted to help me but they didn't even know me and I was so happy.

I can hear Jake barking in the background. Yes, Jake you are special too. You



only have to wag your tail and I melt. I know you don't always get on with the cats but they are special, so be nice to them and stop eating their food.

Recently I had a blip. When I fell last time into my big black hole, I fell so far I had no one to catch me. This time when I fell, I fell right into the arms (branches) of Cherry Tree so I didn't fall too far. Believe me I was clinging on real tight. What if the tree drops me? I had no need to worry, as there were so many arms (branches) surrounding the tree that I was very safe. Although the arms (branches) were very strong they were also very gentle. They didn't squeeze too tight, they got the balance just right and I felt so safe I didn't want to let go of the tree. I can't cling on forever. I have to let go but I know the tree with those big strong gentle arms (branches) that surround it will always be there ready to catch me if I need it.

My journey was a very long one as I was such a long way down that big black hole but I met some very special people along the way. One was a nurse that I met in hospital. I found it very difficult to talk about what happened to me. The nurse said I could have as much time as I wanted. The nurse didn't push me and she gave me space. After a while the nurse said if I was unable to talk about it perhaps I could write it down. I did and I wrote her a letter, it helped so much.

I am now writing this to let people know how much Cherry Tree means to me.

I am now trying to help a community in Bolivia. They don't know me and I don't know them. All I know is they need help and that is good enough for me.

Without Cherry Tree, I am not sure what would have happened to me. It is a very special place. It also taught me it is so rewarding to help other people.

Thank you for listening to my story and THANK YOU CHERRY TREE." Love L