

# Cherry Tree Nursery

## Annual Newsletter 2013



"Cherry Tree Nursery is a microcosm of how we would all like the world to be", one of our volunteers wrote recently. This newsletter comes with our love to all of you who accompany us along this sometimes difficult road, and with our thanks for all the help and support you have given us, enabling us to share our work with an increasing number of people.

April 2013 marked the Nursery's 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday. What better way to celebrate 23 years of offering a supportive community in a plant nursery to the mentally ill, than by constructing Phase 2 of our Sustainable Building Replacement Programme? Our grateful thanks go out to all the individuals and organisations who made this possible, and to the lovely builders who returned to join us with enthusiasm and joy.

The newly completed Phase 2 provides the volunteers with warm comfortable and safe spaces in which to work, learn and recover. We now have a proper Disability Rights Advice room for our CAB adviser Tish Borrowman; Sue Cheeseman can now run her Literacy, Numeracy and English with the Use of Computers classes in comfort, using our Computer/Training room and our new volunteers' working room and library; the volunteers are working on all the Christmas preparations in a warm, dry room for the first time; and we finally have a private soundproofed room to hold reviews and meetings and a wonderful Quiet Room with a woodland atmosphere. And we have a Store Room! All these rooms are built using local natural materials with straw bale walls, fabulous wooden beams and lovely natural light coming through the roof. We have just moved in and everyone is delighted.

The old damp, cold, leaking portacabins that form the office, centre of the life of the volunteers at the nursery, where they bring their troubles, their sorrows and their joys, now looks very odd sitting amidst the new buildings, so we have launched the fundraising appeal for Phase 3 to complete the building programme. The matter is urgent, as the rain is pouring through the roof and windows! Our dream would be to be able to open our new office on our 25<sup>th</sup> birthday in April 2015. If you can help it would be greatly appreciated.

We have been immensely fortunate in being able to start the fundraising with two very generous donations. Tish and Maria intrepidly ran the Bournemouth Marathon for us, raising the magnificent sum of £1,640. The Dorset Golf and Country Club chose us as their charity for the year, and thanks to their extraordinary efforts were able to present us with the enormous sum of £9,000 towards our appeal.

The Knighton Heath Golf Club also supported us this year with a very generous donation towards benches for people to sit outside in the new courtyard space created. We need to thank all the organisations and businesses who kindly donated furniture for the new buildings – especially all who responded to our "chair appeal"!

The construction of Phase 2 has enabled a positive atmosphere of excitement and hope at the nursery despite some difficult times this year, and we are greatly encouraged

by the fact that the builders cannot wait to come back to build Phase 3 – and were the first to make donations towards it! We don't think this happens very often!

We must also thank the kind friend who, in memory of her husband, paid for a clear panel to be installed in the roof of the volunteers' tearoom. This has transformed the daily life of the volunteers. The support shown by everyone for Cherry Tree for this endeavour has done wonders for everyone's morale, and we truly believe that being in buildings built with love from natural materials can transform mental wellbeing.

At the end of October 2013 MIND released a report 'Feel Better Outside, Feel Better Inside' showing the many benefits of 'ecotherapy' – working with plants, growing food, environmental conservation – for mental wellbeing. A survey of 12,000 people showed 70% reporting "significant increases in wellbeing" in the form of improved self-esteem, friendships, and involvement in the community. A Gardeners' World Survey in July 2013 found that out of 1,500 adults surveyed, 93% reported that gardening improves their mood. This all reinforces the value of connecting with the natural world.

Within the nursery itself, a donated polytunnel has been erected to provide a covered area for early plant sales. Along with the polytunnel, a metal shed was also donated, which is being erected this winter. The cover of Tunnel C was damaged in the gales, and the whole structure has been renewed. Another casualty of the bad weather was the shading in the greenhouse, also now repaired thanks to some generous support. We are also working on making the decking safer, thanks to a generous donation.

In 2014 we intend to grow more roses, vegetable plants, fruit trees and bushes, and herbs, as well as producing more of our own mixed planters.

Unfortunately for us, Vicarage Field was not available for car parking for our March plant sale, due to the heavy rains, leading to a big loss in income. However our Open Day was a fantastic success, and our Autumn Plant Sale – held in September – was the most successful ever.

Another big achievement for 2013, thanks to Bournemouth Borough Council, has been opening on Sundays from March to October. This has been very popular and enabled the nursery to find new customers, to offer free tea and coffee in our volunteers' tearoom, and to provide a haven for our volunteers on what can be the hardest day of the week. Many thanks to Dane, Mike, Vic, Georgia and Maureen for making this possible.

Our Plant Sale Days become more like festivals every year. Not only do we have an increasing variety of stalls to complement our high quality plants, but we now offer two extra special delights: live music from our very own band 'The Propagators', and barbecued food, courtesy of our friends from the Rotary Clubs of Bournemouth North and Westbourne.

For our Open Day this year we published our most recent evaluation survey. Among the results it shows that, of the volunteers surveyed about how they feel while attending Cherry Tree, 100% feel safe, 100% feel part of a community, 100% feel cared about, 96% feel they help others, and 82% feel their motivation has improved.

We could not do these pieces of research without the invaluable dedicated hard work of former volunteer Matthew Israel, who moved on to paid work thirteen years ago, and has helped us ever since. Our next piece of research is planned to show to what extent volunteers can carry their personal gains from Cherry Tree with them into the outside world.

Many of the new services we are now offering our volunteers are designed towards this end: strengthening them and giving them tools to cope in their life outside Cherry Tree. So whether it is debt advice, cooking on a budget, healthy eating, (thanks to Annie Newbury and the Dorset Food and Health Trust), or access to courses in local colleges, we aim to offer them more opportunities to enhance their lives. A wonderful example of this is the Knitting Group and the newly established Sewing Group, both set up through links with local organisations. The volunteers are now selling lovingly hand-knitted and sewn items in aid of Phase 3, which, along with seasoned logs and Cherry Tree-produced kindling, are selling well now the cold weather has arrived. Knitting and sewing brings people together and provides an ideal activity to be done together at home.

Volunteers benefited from a Tree Course run by Diana Guy, visiting Furzey Gardens, Canford Arboretum and Bournemouth Gardens to look at the trees there, joined by Chestnut volunteers. They also thoroughly enjoyed making shower gels in a workshop run by Catherine Marshall.

The volunteers' annual Caravan Holiday went further afield this year – to Chichester instead of Weymouth. The Harry Roffey Day annual outing to Mottesfont Abbey was thoroughly enjoyed, and to volunteers' delight this year they were invited by Chestnut Nursery to join them on their trip to Wisley Gardens, an invitation which was reciprocated when Chestnut volunteers came to our annual barbecue.

Other outings have included walks at Moors Valley, the New Forest and Arne, a sponsored walk at Abbotsbury, a trip to Lyme Regis organised by Julie and Elaine, and the usual boat trips. Christopher Lees gave a fascinating talk on the history of Talbot Village, and volunteers participated in Fair Trade Fortnight.

One World Week was a great success this year, thanks to Carl Richards and the World Development Movement. It gives volunteers the opportunity to expand their knowledge of the wider world and issues of global justice.

We have had stalls at Castlepoint, at the Witchampton Show, the Bournemouth Family Festival, and the Ellingham and Ringwood Agricultural Show, where we were proud winners of the Nurseries' Cup.

We were pleased to be involved with providing the plants for the lovely new Oakdale Library Reading Garden, "the Bookerie", where our joint Office Co-ordinator, Ray Alderton put in a great deal of hard work.

We were joined for several days in the summer by the volunteers from the Cheltenham Butterfly Garden who came to stay in Bournemouth in order to work with us.

We have been privileged to have support from many individuals and





organisations throughout 2013. The Victoria Park Drama Society put on a performance for us. The Wessex Centre for Young Musicians made us their Charity of the Year, and put on two performances at the Nursery. Plantswoman Helga Aldersey again opened her garden in aid of Cherry Tree. Christopher Baker did a Skydive for us, and he and his father Peter raised considerable sponsorship. JP Morgan Chase have organised several events in aid of Cherry Tree this year. Their support is much appreciated, as is that of HSBC who helped with our annual Weedathon in June.

Sadly, we lost some dearly loved members of our family in 2013. The indefatigable Peter Wade passed away in January – we have established a friendship bench in his memory, and thanks to Mike Andrews, volunteers went on the “Peter Wade Walk” in Mudeford in September.

More recently we have lost the vibrant Paul Hunt, the stylish Christine Konrad, the gentle Anne Southwood, our dedicated former treasurer Keith James, and the much-loved long-term symbol of Cherry Tree, Lorraine Goddard, whose bubble of laughter seemed to epitomise everything Cherry Tree stands for, and made you feel happy inside.

In recognition of the great need to celebrate and remember all the people we love who are no longer with us, we established the “Day of Celebration and Remembering”, held on November 1<sup>st</sup>. In the words of a volunteer “We talked about the volunteers and friends and looked at photographs. It was very moving and there was a lovely feel to the whole process. We lit candles and decorated the tearoom and lots of people joined us. It was a very special day and will be repeated each year”. A feast of colourful food was provided by our amazing and indispensable catering team of Elaine and Andrea, who do so much for the project.

The highlight of our birthday celebration in April was the unveiling of the Wildlife Board by the pond, which was painted for us by talented wildlife artist Pam Shrubb.

This year there has been a profusion of crickets at Cherry Tree. A lot of frogs spawned in the pond, and there have been many newts and dragonflies. Our fox has returned, and a robin nested in a filing cabinet in the barn. We have had slow worms and grass snakes, and special sightings have been a red kite, a lesser spotted woodpecker, and a clouded yellow butterfly – the first for ten years.

On Bank Holiday Monday in May our patron Richard Drax generously allowed us to sell plants, tea and cake from his estate at Charborough Park in aid of Cherry Tree. Another generous patron this year was Bill Bailey, who kindly gave tickets for his Bournemouth performance to four of our volunteers, and met with them beforehand.

We now have two lovely new cats, brother and sister Magic and Maisie, who keep us entertained.

We have had plenty of contact with our friends from the Parks Department, who have spent much of the year preparing for the arrival of three Shetland cattle – fencing, clearing and installing a water trough in the field behind the nursery. We are also looking forward to involvement with the Hengistbury Head Wildlife Garden next year.

We were delighted that Trevor rediscovered his daughter Jade after 24 years.

After 13 years, we decided to update our DVD. It is always in demand, from people wanting to know about our work or to set

up similar projects elsewhere, and it is invaluable for fundraising. We were very pleased that Simon Cox was able to return to make the new version and look forward to having it available soon.

It is a pleasure to report that, since the appointment of the new Nursery Supervisor, Angela Mansbridge, our sister project, Chestnut Nursery is moving forward in a very positive way, with a great new look, and the two nurseries are working much more closely together. This has been marked by the appointment of a Poole-based Trustee, James Robinson. We are delighted for the first time to welcome a volunteer as a Trustee. Ignatius Harling has considerable experience of fundraising and of working as a trustee at other charities.

Our lovely volunteers continue to raise money for fresh clean water supplies for indigenous Aymara Communities on the Bolivian Altiplano. We were happy to welcome Joan Neary from Quaker Bolivia Link who came down from London, bearing Bolivian crafts, to report back on her visit to some of our communities. The volunteers also continue to be strong supporters of the local Food Bank, who also use our facilities for their meetings. Half a million people now visit food banks, according to Oxfam, a number which has risen by 170% in the last twelve months, in the seventh wealthiest nation on the planet. The shocking figures released on 18 November 2013 show that the number of cases of malnutrition treated in British hospitals has nearly doubled in the last three years, with an increasing number of children being diagnosed with rickets.

We now have 166 people on our books, and demand for places is greater than it ever has been; we have had 108 referrals so far this year, reflecting the national upsurge in instances of mental illness, fuelled by the recession and the austerity measures introduced. According to government figures, over 400 people in the UK face a very serious mental health crisis each week, and the real figure is probably much higher. A MIND study published in July reported a 50% increase in calls to their national mental health telephone helpline.

In September the House of Commons Select Committee reported that "Pressure on psychiatric wards has become so great that doctors are sectioning mental health patients unnecessarily, because it is often seen as the only way to gain access to a bed ..... it is becoming increasingly difficult for mental health patients to gain access to hospital on a voluntary basis".

Lord Victor Adebawale wrote in the Independent (18/11/2013) "I know from talking to NHS Chief Executives that welfare reforms are often to blame for more people in distress finding themselves in police cells. Threats to cut sickness support are putting the most vulnerable under tremendous stress. Hundreds of mental health beds have closed in recent years and this means that those in crisis are not always receiving the support they need, sometimes with devastating consequences". "Police cells", said the Police and Crime Commissioner for Dorset in the Bournemouth Echo (17/9/2013) "are no place for the mentally ill".

In the words of Tish Borrowman, "The situation for the mentally ill in the UK at the moment is dire. Everything is being cut. Those who do not have someone to represent them are forgotten". "The threat of the dreaded brown envelope through the door is a feature of life for all on

benefits, a daily reminder that you are only ever a heartbeat away from complete destitution. The Welfare State is not a political weapon to stigmatise or scapegoat people, force down wages and pursue a 'work makes you free' ideology. It should exist as the opposite – to empower, provide dignity, and act as a force against poverty" (wording from a current petition 'Benefit Sanctions must be stopped').

The UK Giving Report, published by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Charities Aid Foundation, shows that last year people in the UK gave the smallest amount to charities since the survey began in 2004, describing it as an "erosion in giving". The CAF further reported that 1 in 6 UK charities face closure, and 1 in 3 have cut the services and the jobs they offer. In this climate our income from donations has fallen considerably from the amount raised ten years ago. We still cover our salaries through plant sales, but rely on the generosity of you, our supporters, to cover our day to day running costs. This is why we are enclosing a small appeal form asking you all to consider either making a donation by standing order and helping to give us a regular income, or making a one-off donation.

"Cherry Tree Nursery", a volunteer said recently, "is small enough for you to be able to make a difference to it, but big enough for us to be able to make a difference in the world".

We know that we must continue to be here for those who need us for as long as they need us. Thank you, all of you, for helping us to fulfil that commitment.

Three of our volunteers returned to employment in 2013. One of them wrote to us recently:

"It is only through your help that I have been able to get back to employment. I want to say a big THANK YOU for all the help and support you have given me throughout my time as a volunteer and for your continued kindness. You provide an indispensable support and hope to those in darkness and hopelessness, and a way forward for so many to a brighter future, a sense of self-worth, a feeling of community and of long-lasting friendship. May God bless all those involved with Cherry Tree Nursery".

Every day our volunteers inspire us with their spirit, their care for each other and their love.

One of them wrote recently: "Cherry Tree Nursery by its existence has saved many lives, mine included. I have been here seven years now, and have no desire to be anywhere else. I love it here and the thing I like most is the unconditional love we all experience every day. I love being round plants – as they are non-threatening and have a spiritual quality about them. I truly feel accepted here as do so many of the volunteers. Compassion, love and wisdom is what oozes out of Cherry Tree Nursery".

*"And let no one judge or condemn that which they do not understand, because difference is a sign that all is not lost, that we still have a lot to see and hear, and that there are still other worlds to discover".*