

Lindengate, let nature nurture

A horticultural mental health project in rural Buckinghamshire, proves richly rewarding for one of our WRAGs trainees



Some of the beautiful flowers for the wildflower conservation project

My apprenticeship placement is at a mental health charity, called Lindengate, in Wendover, Buckinghamshire. I am here to develop my horticultural experience, as I have completed my RHS level 2 and am commencing a career in horticulture. Lindengate is a beautiful five acre site that was previously used for allotments, with the vision of an amazing lady called Charlie Powell the site has been developed as a place to support people with mental health needs, using the healing power of nature and horticulture

My role is to be part of the site and horticulture team working alongside Charlie and Andy Grant, my mentor and I have had the opportunity to practice and hone many skills including seed propagation. I have also been involved with developing a cuttings garden and working in the kitchen garden. I have been privileged to be a part of wildflower conservation including the Horseshoe Vetch for the endangered Chalkhill and Adonis blue butterflies and working in the tree nursery,

conserving and increasing the endangered Black Poplar, which has been absolutely fascinating.

The effect of Lockdown has been huge on this charity, initially being closed completely to all 'gardeners', a term used to refer to the people accessing the service. They have had to change their current focus to respond to the changing mental health needs arising from this Covid 19 pandemic. Out of this crisis, Lindengate are offering support to NHS and all key and essential workers in a calm, safe and relaxing environment, where they can come to rest and reflect in our therapeutic gardens, giving them the opportunity to relax and find time for those all-important moments of peace. For this to happen we have worked incredibly hard to prepare each area of the garden. As you turn each corner you come across another place to sit and rest, along with a bottle of hand sanitiser!

This is truly an inspiring place to work and to be and I work alongside the staff and large team of amazing volunteers who maintain the site and carry out all the huge numbers of tasks that there are in such a big garden. Here nature breathes new life into those who are struggling with their wellbeing, so lending itself to supporting people in recovering from a wide range of mental health needs. The natural beauty and richness of the site help to restore and heal, specialised gardening, conservation, construction, cooking, and nature based art and crafts activities provide focus and purpose and a supportive, non-judgemental community the safety to take the road to recovery.

Claire Harris