

Trellis Conference 18th March 2009

Report on Workshop 1 'Horti-Therapy' – Developing the Profession *A research workshop*

Workshop Context and Method

Duration (55 mins)

Morning Session- 15 attendees

Afternoon Session –9 attendees

The workshop presented by Jenny Simpson and Vicki Ferguson & assisted by Gordon Croll (Morning Session) and John Davidson (Afternoon Session) as TH education advisers.

The workshop consisted of a short presentation about Trellis, its aims and how it supports the network of therapeutic gardening projects.

The aim of the presentation was stimulate debate through a focus on 3 main aspects of Trellis' work: training; a therapeutic horticulture qualification; and the establishment of a professional body for 'Horti-Therapy'.

The following questions were then posed:

Issues in therapeutic gardening?

Project Training needs?

A need for a qualification in TG?

A need for professional body?

Who should we lobby in your area?

Small groups (5 people) each had five minutes to discuss each question before feeding back to the main group, this feedback was captured on a combination of flipchart; training needs assessment sheet and post-its which were handed in by the attendees at the end of the session.

The discussion, answers given and points raised by those taking part in this workshop are collated and summarised in this document and set out below.

Issues In therapeutic gardening?

The first question was very general asking for groups to highlight which issues they thought were important in therapeutic gardening. The groups highlighted a range of issues that affect therapeutic gardening:

Finance

The lack of dependable, sustainable funding was highlighted. Questions were raised as to how to create sustainable income. It was noted by delegates that many of them had come across gardening projects that had lapsed and they were often gardening on sites that had previously been flourishing garden projects that had ceased due to lack of funding.

When funding was made available the evaluation of projects was problematic. Delegates wanted to lobby for better forms and guidance on evaluation from funders.

Project Management, People Management and Training

There was a general consensus that information and training in project management was required. Because many projects worked with diverse social groups there was also a requirement for information and training to be made available for those working with people with profound disabilities and a call for more widely available information and understanding of project users physical and mental abilities in order to plan and tailor project activities. It was also thought useful to have more information and training on sensory gardens (therapeutic uses); seasonal activities and gardening health & safety.

There was also a need for more volunteers to participate in projects and a requirement for project staff to understand how to manage and motivate others: project users; volunteers and other staff members. Further aspects of training are discussed in the Project Training Needs section below.

Obstacles to User Participation

Some delegates expressed their frustration at not being able to enable their project to be accessed by project users due to 'red tape issues'. One example of this was transport, where seatbelt legislation & lack of provision prevented children accessing planned sessions at a garden project. Transport issues, especially for schools, are a barrier to accessing some garden projects.

Getting the word out there

Communicating the presence of a project, advertising its benefits and ensuring uptake of service users are also a considerable challenge. Making contact with the community in general as well as gardening groups, horticultural and care specialists are time consuming and difficult tasks.

Fundamentals of 'Horti-Therapy'

In addition, issues around the basis of therapeutic horticulture itself were raised. The vocabulary and definition of 'horti-therapy' was highlighted as subject for further debate in order to clarify meaning and a wording that satisfies those working in the field.

The issue of the perceived value of horti- therapy was also raised: the extent of the understanding of the concept and whether it is valued as a therapy by society.

Project Training Needs

The Project Training Needs question sheet was presented to each delegate to complete in a short 3minute session and then feed back to the whole group. The first section asked what type of training they would like to see provided for project staff in an ideal world. This list summarises the types of training these groups of delegates would like to see provided.

One delegate described the ideal staff training, stating that it would encompass *'whatever provides insight into the specialist topics to enhance their staff role.'* Whole group discussion suggested the following:

- Understanding the clients needs
- More understanding about peoples' disabilities
- Basic understanding mental health issues
- Basic understanding of learning disabilities
- Working with specific/multiple needs (physical & mental)
- Training in understanding & knowledge of sensory gardens & the therapeutic benefits they offer those with profound & multiple learning disabilities
- Sensory Gardening
- Mental Health awareness (for staff and Volunteers)
- Care skills
- Shadowing: Working alongside OT's & other health professionals in health promotion work and even GP's
- Working with children (including child protection)

Management & Project Management Training

- Fundraising
- Project management skills
- Evaluation
- Opportunity to explore the ethos of the individual project
- Team building
- Training for staff who are leading groups
- Dealing with and supporting volunteers; Training volunteers; Volunteer co-ordination & motivation
- Child protection for those working directly with children
- Connecting with the community
- Ensuring continuity of provision

Good Housekeeping & Basic Horticulture

- First Aid
- Food Hygiene
- Health & safety in gardening
- Annual Training Programme–CPD & to cover staff turnover esp. basic horticulture
- Basic Growing skills e.g. seed sowing or propagation
- Basic gardening skills

- How to grow plants – basic skills especially in relation to organic growing
- Skills in the area of gardening and building
- Seasonal gardening
- Medicinal herb gardening

Horticultural Therapy Focus

- Reasons for horti-therapy
- Methods for therapy
- Opportunity to bring ideas together specific to horticultural therapy
- Mechanism (time/space) that brings together all the benefits and activities that can be achieved in HT projects
- Gardening skills/ therapeutic values

Interest in CPD Trellis Training

As well as answering open questions about what type of training they would find useful the delegates were asked to consider the following list of training courses available from trellis over the next year and tick the box next to those they/their staff would consider attending. The table below details the interest in each of these training courses.

Interest expressed by delegates in training courses which can be offered by Trellis

Accessible Garden Site Design	12
Involving the Community	10
Challenging Behaviour	4
Disabilities Awareness in Gardening	10
Health & Safety in Horticulture	11
Basic Propagation/ Gardening Skills	7
Planning a Year round Horti- programme	7
Social Enterprise	4
Income Generation	10
Negotiating Contracts with Funding Bodies e.g. Service Level Agreements with Local Authorities	7

A need for a qualification in TG/A need for a professional body?

These questions prompted a great deal of debate and because of the short length of time available (5 mins in small discussion groups and 5 mins to collect feedback) led to many questions being raised and much to be debated and discussed in the future

The points fed back to the whole group in both workshops are summarised in the following paragraphs:

Qualification benefits

Having a qualification in therapeutic gardening was generally thought to be a positive step. But it was stressed that not everyone was necessarily looking for qualifications and that many volunteers were interested in gardening as a recreation.

It was also posited that taking the professional / qualifications route may mean a restructuring of gardening projects, similar too that undertaken by 'Riding for the disabled' who 'professionalised' several years ago. Many small riding projects ceased to function and larger centres of excellence flourished.

Other points brought up were:

- The importance of ensuring that the qualification is recognised
- Qualified staff would be able to pass on skills to other staff in projects
- Qualifications help to justify funding – could open door to funding
- Not all looking for qualifications – many volunteers in the field
- Will it restrict /deter people if there is not a qualified person at a project?

Qualification in TG

- In short- term, Trellis courses will help
- Broader base of skills needed (e.g. Staff in day centres need more generic skills training)
- Is it qualification or could it be portfolio/peer led?
- Is it range of qualifications?
- What goes on in the course?
- Peer education- Useful to learn from OT's /learn from each other
- Modular way of training –allow people to access what is relevant to them
- Fast-track required - if some people have qualifications already

Professional body

There was general agreement that there was a need for a professional body although how smaller voluntary run projects fit into this framework was unclear. The existence of a professional body was thought to confer several benefits, similar to those assigned to the TG qualification:

- Useful to set and maintain standards
- Help to value the profession
- Help to justify funding
- There was thought to be a need for a 'profession' to act as encouragement to those already in the field and to attract future volunteers
- It was suggested that professional status could be conferred by peer review

Who should we lobby in your area?

The final question asked delegates to nominate one or more persons in their local area who they thought needed persuading that therapeutic gardening was effective and worthwhile and worthy of funding. Delegates wrote contact details on post its and posted them on the 'Who Should We Lobby in Your Area?' poster. These contact details will be collated and invitations to future Trellis events such as project visits; study tours and other profile raising activities can be forwarded to them.