Thrive is a small national charity that uses gardening to change the lives of disabled people.

Thrive is registered in the UK as the Society for Horticultural Therapy. Thrive is a registered charity (number 277570) and a limited company (number 1415700). Thrive is grateful to everyone involved in providing photographs for this guide. Photographs on the front page and pages 3, 7, 9, 14, 23, 26, 27 © Caroline Nieuwenhuys 2008, Front page and page 16 © Muir Vidler and The Times 2008, page 18 © Paul Rogers and The Times 2008, page 21 © Matt Writtle and The Times 2008. © Thrive 2009.

Cover and text pages are printed on revive 100 Offset, a recycled grade containing 100% post consumer waste and manufactured at a mill accredited with ISO14001 environmental management standard. The pulp used in this product is bleached using a Totally Chlorine Free process (TCF).
“As Patron of Thrive I am delighted to support their excellent work and dedication in using gardening to change the lives of disabled people. I have visited Thrive and found it inspirational to learn of the achievements of those who, despite a variety of difficulties, are able to obtain valuable horticultural and life skills.”

HRH Princess Alexandra
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thrive today</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening saves lives – Monty Don’s story</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does Thrive offer?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study: Tim</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebuilding his life after an accident</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability in the UK</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The power of gardening</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study: James</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving his future through a qualification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to use gardening</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas for activities</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using gardening at home</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study: Sally Brampton</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horticultural therapy</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study: Veronica</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building a different life after a stroke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do garden projects offer?</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study: Eileen</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping those with dementia and their gardening memories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrive’s garden projects</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study: Gavin</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosed with schizophrenia and still making the most of life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrive’s Trunkwell Garden Project</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrive’s Battersea Garden Project</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extending our influence</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study: Ken</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study: Mark</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating that a visual impairment is not a barrier to gardening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrive – our history</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since its inception in 1978 Thrive’s aim has remained constant: to make use of gardening to change the lives of disabled people. In the UK today, one in five people are living with a disability that they were born with, gained as they aged or as a result of an illness or accident.

Thrive is a small national charity that uses the process of gardening to help disabled people literally transform their lives. Thrive offers help to disabled people who want to garden at home, on an allotment or in a community setting or who alternatively, may want to access structured horticultural therapy programmes.

Gardening can bring profound change, from improvements in physical or psychological health to adjustments in beliefs, attitudes or behaviours to the transformation of skills, knowledge and abilities. Thrive has a wealth of evidence and experience to support this.

Ultimately the changes people make can help them overcome everyday obstacles and challenges they may face in their lives. Thrive believes that individual change is like a pebble in a pool and ripples out touching family, friends, acquaintances, community and finally society, of which the person is a part.

From the survey ‘Levels of interest and participation in gardening among individuals with a disability’ Mintel 2006 for Thrive

- Three out of four people found that gardening has been beneficial to their health
- One in three believe gardening has ongoing health benefits
- One in five report that gardening has helped them through a period of mental or physical ill health.

Three out of four people found that gardening has been beneficial to their health
- One in three believe gardening has ongoing health benefits
- One in five report that gardening has helped them through a period of mental or physical ill health.
“For the first fifteen years or so of my life I hated gardening. I was brought up in a large family with a sprawling garden and my parents not unreasonably saw their five children as a useful workforce in the perpetual struggle of keeping it under control and producing all our vegetables. Most days we would be handed out tasks that, with hindsight, were not at all unreasonable. The lawn had to be mown, the strawberries weeded, parsnips thinned or perhaps the potatoes earthed up. At the time I did them all slowly and unwillingly and certainly without a glimmer of pleasure. But I spent a long time in the garden and, despite myself, learnt how to do many basic horticultural tasks. I learnt its rhythms.

“Then, when I was about 17, I was sowing carrots after school on a mild, midgy March evening. The sun was setting behind the beech tree and the air was full of the soft, folding calls of wood pigeons going to roost. I suddenly had a powerful sense of absolute contentment. The earth felt perfectly smooth to my fingers, the seed absolutely in the right place in my cupped hand. I knew just what to do and exactly how to do it. I knew that this was a measure of happiness that I would always be able to refer to.

“That feeling has never really gone away. There are days when you are glad to have finished a certain job or when you long for spring, but the garden and gardening itself has never failed to be a source of inspiration and comfort for me.

“For many years this did not translate into anything other than a private richness. My wife and I gardened together from almost the first day we met but in our own time and we hardly knew anyone else was the least bit interested in our passion. The thought of earning a living from it never entered my mind. But through a complicated and unlikely set of circumstances I found myself at the age of 34 writing a book about a garden I was making in Herefordshire and presenting gardening items on Granada’s This Morning programme – although I never even knew daytime television existed before I appeared on it. I heard people refer to me as an ‘expert’ when I knew for certain that I was no more than an enthusiastic – well OK, obsessive – amateur. Life has a funny way of going about things.

“It got odder. My company went under and I found myself without a day job. We had to sell our house and all our possessions to pay the debts. No one bought the book. Telly work dried up. I had no money, no home, three small children and the depression that I had lived with for many years became a full-blown breakdown. Things were very grim indeed.

“Gardening healed me. Slowly – and there were many bad days – I struggled towards that feeling I had when I was sowing carrot seeds on the March evening. Slowly I returned to the earth and was able to grow. Simple things – cutting the grass, planting a tray of violas – created a ripple of confidence that carried me forward. Of course there were other things too; drugs, counselling, and not least, the constant love of my wife Sarah, but none of that would have worked without a garden to work in.

“So I know how it is. I have got lucky. Things are going well. I am well. But I still fight depression. I still need the garden to ease a troubled mind. I know from my own experience that gardening does so much more than tidy up the outside of our houses or entertain us on television. Gardening saves lives.”
What does Thrive offer?

1 Information, guidance and advice
A comprehensive information service is available for those looking for support to garden at home. People can access on-the-spot advice, fact sheets and a variety of written and audio publications as well as specific guides such as:
- *Gardening for Hearts & Minds* – a step-by-step guide for those who want to use gardening as part of their rehabilitation following a heart attack or stroke.
- *Getting on with Gardening* – a guide full of practical information for blind or partially sighted gardeners.
- *Websites* – [www.thrive.org.uk](http://www.thrive.org.uk) offers further information on Thrive and is linked to its sister website [www.carryongardening.org.uk](http://www.carryongardening.org.uk) which gives practical advice and a large amount of information about gardening with a disability.

2 Opportunities to learn
- *Roadshows* – give the individual gardener an opportunity to take part in practical demonstrations and workshops across England to learn useful tips and techniques to take home.
- *Short Training Programmes* – throughout the year offering one or two day courses on a variety of topics suitable for horticultural therapists, health, education or social care professionals.
- *Higher Education* – in partnership with Coventry University, Thrive offers the only professional diploma in social and therapeutic horticulture.
- *Bespoke Courses* – for those who want something tailor-made.

3 Horticultural therapy programmes
From two gardens, one in Battersea Park, London and the other at its head office in Beech Hill, Reading, Thrive offers subsidised places on a range of programmes to disabled people aged between 14 and 85. These include rehabilitation, dementia and head injury programmes as well as programmes which lead to a vocational qualification.

4 Links into local communities
If you are looking for a place for a friend or relative at one of the UK’s 1,000 Garden Projects, which offer horticultural therapy to over 24,000 disabled people each week, Thrive carries a national database and contact details.

5 Volunteering
Whether you are an organisation looking for a team volunteering day or an individual with a few hours to spare, volunteers are welcome in a wide variety of roles. You may want to use your existing skills at Thrive, try something different or get outdoors in the garden supporting clients or simply join with others in social gardening. Students studying social work or occupational therapy have been coming to Thrive for many years as part of their practical learning experience on their courses.
Over ten years ago, an horrific road accident put Tim in a coma for nine weeks and in hospital for two years. His head injuries left him with memory loss and balance problems and robbed him of 80 percent of his sight. His difficult behaviour – not uncommon in people with such severe injuries – eventually led to divorce and the loss of access to his children. Tim didn’t have much to look forward to. But he’d always loved gardening.

A visit to Thrive gave Tim a new-found optimism. To start with, he relied on a stick and dark glasses, but the gentle physical exercise helped rehabilitate Tim from his injuries.

Tim grew in strength and confidence. He passed national qualifications in gardening and soon other people at Thrive were turning to him for support – an incredible situation considering he’d spent so long being dependent on others.

Tim now works for Thrive full-time. And up to 14 people every day, people once just as desperate and dependent as he was, now benefit from his boundless optimism and skills.

Tim is a living example of what Thrive can help people achieve.

The disabled population in the UK today is large at just over 10 million people. It is also diverse, in terms of age, income and education.

The likelihood of disability increases with age, but every day 75 children are born or diagnosed with a disability. When you read the word disability, you might think about people in a wheelchair, but disability can be both permanent and temporary and much broader, including people who have had a heart attack or a car accident. One in seven of us has a hearing problem and there are two million people living with a visual impairment. Stroke remains the largest cause of physical disability with 130,000 new cases each year. One in four of us will experience some kind of mental health problem in the course of the year and over 40,000 children now use anti-depressants.

Disabled people are more likely to live in poverty and earn less than half of a non-disabled person. One in five people of working age in the UK is disabled, but only half of them are in work, while 1.2 million would like to work but can’t find jobs.

Twenty one percent of disabled people aged 16–24 have no qualifications compared with nine percent of non-disabled of the same age. Disabled children are 13 times more likely to be excluded from school and disabled 16 year olds are twice as likely to be out of work.
The power of gardening
The five key benefits

Gardening offers a range of tasks and, irrespective of age or ability can support people in reaching their goals. The five key benefits are:

1. **Better physical health** – gardening is a form of exercise which can be used in rehabilitation, rebuilding strength after an accident or illness. It has been shown it can help improve bone density in older people and can help us in tackling problems such as obesity which can lead to more serious problems such as diabetes.

2. **Improved psychological health** – a wealth of evidence outlines the positive aspects of gardening on our mental health including its ability to help us with optimism, offering a regular routine, a sense of purpose and achievement. For those who garden in a group there can be additional positive effects on their self-esteem and self-worth.

3. **Social benefits** – it has been reported that those who have greater social contact feel healthier. Gardening offers a sustainable interest which can help people to connect with others and for some, irrespective of age, an opportunity to improve social and communication skills.

4. **Qualifications and skills** – a recognised horticultural qualification can increase the chances of employment. Taking part in structured gardening activities offers the opportunity to improve skills such as initiative, co-operation, patience, concentration as well as numeracy and literacy all of which are useful in all areas of life.

5. **Access to the natural environment** – research in environmental psychology shows that the natural environment promotes recovery from stress and helps to restore the ability to focus attention. Gardens provide restorative environments. Being outside, getting fresh air and seeing things grow are important to us as human beings. Gardening allows us to connect with nature.

James
Improving his future through a qualification

James was bullied at school. He felt isolated and suicidal. James internalised these feelings and became verbally and physically aggressive, not to people but to objects. He kicked in a door at a local community group. He felt unsociable and effectively pushed all his good friends away, isolating himself even further.

James’s mother had already identified he had been experiencing difficulties. They have a good relationship and James felt able to disclose how suicidal he had become. Clearly alarm bells were ringing for the whole family at this stage.

At 14 years old, James was facing exclusion from school, which could mean leaving school with no qualifications. His family turned to Thrive. Working with his hands he found a place to express his creativity and showed an eagerness to learn. In gardening he was able to come to terms with and manage his feelings of anger.

Two years after coming to Thrive James completed an NVQ Level 1 in Horticulture. Since then he has attended youth groups, and gained the bronze Youth Achievement Award. James is now set to move on and would like to either train in sports management, or work as a greenkeeper as his other passion is golf.

James says: “Thrive really helped me. I thought I would leave school without any qualifications and now I’ve got an NVQ and much more, thanks to Thrive.”
How to use gardening

Six simple steps

**Step one:** Commit to giving yourself some gardening time. This can be from five minutes to 30 minutes. Often small periods of time throughout the day can be better than one long session.

**Step two:** Decide where and when you are going to garden. This might be in your own garden, at a friend’s, in a community garden, on an allotment or even on a balcony or using a window box.

**Step three:** Before you start, take a moment to consider what you want. It could be for example that you want to improve your balance, to get better at holding tools, build your concentration, develop a skill such as planting or seed sowing. It might be you want to help somebody else to overcome their feelings of isolation and loneliness or to help them to have fun.

**Step four:** Decide what gardening activities or tasks you could do based on the time of year. How could they help you get what you want? (The table opposite may give you some ideas.)

**Step five:** Garden!

**Step six:** Reflect on what you have done. Would you do anything differently next time? How did it make you feel? Did you get what you wanted?

---

### Ideas for activities and their benefit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Tasks</th>
<th>Physical Benefit</th>
<th>Emotional/ Psychological Benefit</th>
<th>Transferable Element</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SPRING</strong> Mar – May</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pruning – roses, buddleja</td>
<td>Reaching</td>
<td>Concentration</td>
<td>Access to outdoors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seed sowing – annuals, early salad</td>
<td>Manual dexterity</td>
<td>Looking forward</td>
<td>Co-ordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crops</td>
<td>(fine motor skills)</td>
<td>Recall of past experiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planting – potatoes, fruit bushes</td>
<td>Manual dexterity</td>
<td>Sense of achievement</td>
<td>Buying seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulching</td>
<td>Gross motor skills</td>
<td>External focus</td>
<td>Enhanced confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bending</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling fitter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUMMER</strong> Jun – Aug</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planting containers</td>
<td>Sitting or standing</td>
<td>Instant gratification</td>
<td>Re-enforcement of skills and knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>balance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upper body movement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadheading</td>
<td>Hand / eye co-ordination</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Sustaining fine motor skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawn mowing</td>
<td>Balance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aerobic exercise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watering</td>
<td>Strength</td>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stamina</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ownership of life / feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aerobic exercise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To find out more about these and other seasons please contact Thrive.
To help people harness the benefits of gardening at home, Thrive runs an information service, produces a range of information materials and has two comprehensive websites www.thrive.org.uk and www.carryongardening.org.uk, which offer advice and ideas on a range of topics from garden design, tools through to practical tips and techniques on how to garden when you have a specific disability or health need.

Thrive also offers a range of workshops and roadshows across England. These are aimed at inspiring disabled gardeners as well as teaching them practical gardening techniques which Thrive has acquired over thirty years, and which can be used in their own gardening.

For those who have had a stroke or heart attack we have developed an easy-to-use guide which is offered to those leaving stroke or heart units across England. This shows in a step-by-step way how to use gardening in their rehabilitation at home. A National Blind Gardeners’ Club offers those who are blind or partially sighted a quarterly audio magazine as well as on the spot information and advice.

Sally Brampton is a journalist and novelist, and was the founding editor of British Elle. But she is also a depressive, and in the past has become so ill that she has twice attempted suicide. She wrote the book, Shoot the Damn Dog, a memoir of her depression. Sally gave this interview to The Times in support of Thrive as part of the newspaper’s Christmas Appeal 2008.

“Gardening keeps you connected into the seasons and keeps you connected into life itself. I think that’s really important if you suffer from any kind of mood disorder to have that kind of optimism, to know there is always a future.

“When I’m gardening the only thing I think about is gardening. I think it’s what psychologists call flow – you become completely absorbed in something that you’re doing and it transcends everything, you just forget everything else.

“When you are very depressed you might be suicidal you know, which is just one of the symptoms of severe depression. I think that what a garden teaches you is that things die, but things come back, and there is always this constant cycle.

“I just think what Thrive does is absolutely fantastic, I’ve always thought with Thrive that there is a feeling of real acceptance about people and their differences and it brings people together, that’s just wonderful.”

Shoot the Damn Dog, A Memoir of Depression
Sally Brampton,
published by Bloomsbury
Horticultural Therapy:
New practice but old thinking

Horticultural therapy is a relatively new profession but the concept evolved centuries ago. Court physicians in Egypt prescribed walks in the Palace gardens for mentally disturbed royalty, and later Dr Benjamin Rush (1745–1813) opened the door to the active use of horticulture in the treatment of mental illness. Servicemen returning from the World Wars were encouraged to take part in this purposeful activity and as a result hospital stays reduced. In the 1930s gardening was accepted as a valuable occupational therapy tool for physical and psychiatric disorders by occupational therapists.

In the UK today, trained professionals in social and therapeutic horticulture offer structured programmes to over 24,000 disabled people on a weekly basis. Activities normally take place at ‘garden projects’ which are located in every region. They can be allotments, walled gardens, green spaces outside hospitals or even a small patch in an industrial estate. The first recorded project, which is still active, was founded in 1913 in Ayrshire. Thrive maintains the national database of UK garden projects and offers a wide variety of training and support to them.

My life was going nowhere and things got really bad – I thought about suicide. Coming to Thrive completely turned my life around. I made new friends and got all this support from people there, and I’ve got formal qualifications too, there’s no way I’d be where I am today without Thrive."

James

Veronica
Building a different life after a stroke

Veronica is 54 years old and had a stroke in 2005. She lost the sight in one of her eyes and can’t use her left arm and leg. The stroke completely changed her life and she urgently needed something new to focus on to help rebuild her confidence and get her strength back.

Veronica had always liked gardening and a referral by social services allowed her to start coming to the Thrive Trunkwell Garden Project for one day a week. Veronica says: “I wish I’d found out about Thrive earlier. The first day I came I didn’t want to go home! I wasn’t sure what to expect because I hadn’t been out of the house for years – I had stayed in bed wishing I was dead. Then I was shown around the garden and I thought it was lovely.”

At first, Veronica found her trips to Thrive very tiring but slowly she started to use her good side more, stretching to reach gardening tools and helping with tabletop tasks. “I’ve been sorting vegetables, cutting flowers and even sowing seeds and potting on. The therapists show me how to use the tools – I found the secateurs difficult, but using them at

Thrive helped me to cut things with scissors at home – the first time I’d managed to cut anything myself since I had my stroke.”

Veronica’s progress has been so good that she now comes to Thrive for two days a week and she absolutely loves it. As well as helping with the gardening jobs, she now works in the Secret Garden at Trunkwell and has started digging and planting flowers in the raised beds.

“I would come to Thrive every day of the week if I could – even weekends. It really has made such a difference – it’s the best thing I’ve ever done."
What do garden projects offer?

Garden projects offer people of all ages, who have a wide range of disabilities, the opportunity to engage in regular gardening throughout the year in a structured way. Skilled professionals, work to defined social and therapeutic horticultural practices, which take account of both physical and psychological needs to meet goals agreed with that individual.

People sometimes decide for themselves to attend a garden project but most likely they will be referred by occupational therapists, through social services, or specific teams, such as community mental health, learning disability or older persons teams.

Attendance will vary but is normally at least once each week for an agreed period. Gardening activities are mostly within the project itself but could be out in the community or a nearby local setting. Costs vary by project, but from Thrive’s research first published in 2005, the average fee is £55 per person per day. For Thrive, the real cost is almost three times this and the difference is made up from charitable donations. The number of people attending a project will depend on its size, resources, staff and volunteers. At Thrive we operate a ratio of seven or eight people to one therapist and this group is then supported by up to three volunteers.

Eileen
Helping those with dementia and their gardening memories

Eileen has dementia. She is 55 years old and was an active wife and mother, looking forward to the time when she might be a grandmother. Her husband Alan told us:

“Eileen has gradually gone from being able to do everything you and I can do, to being practically incapable of anything. It’s heart breaking to watch her deteriorate. Sometimes she has tears in her eyes. She can hardly speak any more, so I can only imagine the trauma of what she must be going through.”

Eileen attended a Thrive Garden Project once a week while her dementia was in the early stages. It made a difference to her life and Alan could see the difference: “After a day at Thrive, she laughed and joked and quietly hummed to herself. Thrive made her happy again. Eileen used to be a terrific gardener.”

Dementia is a progressive, debilitating disease which causes a decline in memory and at least one other cognitive function. It is estimated that 775,000 people are living with dementia in the UK.

For those in the early stages of dementia, gardening can help. It can stimulate positive memories, offers gentle exercise, creativity and a route through isolation for the individual and the carer. Gardening can literally help people to re-connect with their family.
Thrive runs two garden projects, one located just outside Reading, and the other in London’s Battersea Park. Thrive’s projects are integral to meeting the delivery of the vision, mission and aims of the whole organisation, which places them in a unique position amongst UK garden projects. They support Thrive by offering:

- A tangible demonstration of the principles and practices of social and therapeutic horticulture for those members of the public and professionals who are interested.

- A focal point for quality standards and best practice within social and therapeutic horticulture. This in turn is used in our training for health, social care and educational professionals as well as those actively involved in running garden projects all over the UK.

- An opportunity to trial cutting edge practices or pilot gardening solutions which meet the needs of either a defined group of people or those who have specific disabilities. Then, based on evaluation, Thrive considers whether to replicate or extend pilot work regionally or nationally.

Both of Thrive’s garden projects offer a variety of programmes that take place both at the garden and in the local community. These include:

- A rehabilitation programme for those who have had a stroke or heart attack
- A spring/summer programme for those who have dementia
- A transition programme for those moving from secure mental health units back into the community
- A two year programme for young people with special educational needs. This leads to a vocational qualification which also contains an element of ‘stealth’ learning to help students develop important transferable skills such as patience, team working, communication, numeracy and literacy.

All the programmes offered are aimed at supporting people to make positive changes in their lives and progress.

“Gavin was diagnosed with schizophrenia and still making the most of life

“I used to get bad mood swings but going into the garden and having a purpose in life has helped to reduce those.”

Gavin first came to Thrive in 2001, 12 years after he was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Today, Gavin is looking forward to independence. After seven years working with Thrive’s therapists as a client, he joined our supported volunteer project and then moved on to a part-time paid job. He is also working as a volunteer in the research laboratory at King’s College London, a really positive move for him as before his illness he was a biochemist at St Mary’s Hospital in Paddington.

Commenting on how schizophrenia affected him, Gavin says: “I had great problems reacting to my environment. I would walk into a room and feel as if I was in a trance. Gardening has helped me overcome that. At Thrive, you do a full day which helps to build stamina and helps you get back into a work routine. There is also a fantastic mix of people there and my social life has taken off.

“My doctors say that since I started gardening, the improvement has been obvious. They hope that soon I will be able to move into a house or flat of my own. I just hope it has a garden!”

Gavin has given interviews about his experience at Thrive, has written articles for Thrive’s journal GrowthPoint, and has produced a research paper on gardening and mental health. He has also completed a video course and has taken the Royal School of Music Grade 6 exam on the violin. These are things which he admits he wouldn’t have dreamt of doing a few years ago.
Operating from a Victorian walled garden and adjacent three acre allotment, Thrive offers a wide range of programmes and activities for disabled people of all ages interested in gardening. Participants come from Berkshire, Surrey, South Oxfordshire and Hampshire. Whilst most of the gardening takes place on site, Thrive also works out in the community on projects which benefit local people. This includes the maintenance of the walled garden at the ancient ruins of Basing House outside Basingstoke; a conservation project at a local National Trust property, The Vyne and a trailblazing pilot project working with older people returning from hospital in Hampshire.

Nearly 110,000 of Berkshire’s 800,000 residents have some form of disability. This includes over 15,000 with dementia and many children with autism or mental health problems, so the demand for places at Trunkwell is high.

Trunkwell garden is an approved centre for City and Guilds to offer the NPTC Skills for Working Life at Level 2 and 3, Life Skills, Level 1, 2 and 3 and the National Vocational Qualification in Horticulture at Level 1. People can work to whole awards or individual units.

Trunkwell has developed particular skills in working with young people who have special needs or mental health issues, with people affected by dementia, those recovering from a stroke or head injury and those with a learning disability, helping them to move on with their lives.
Currently Thrive runs three gardens within the park; a Victorian Herb Garden, an Old English Garden and a ‘Main’ garden, close to the sports arena which has the office, training room and plant sales area. As well as programmes at the gardens, Thrive also runs a project at both Bethlem and Springfield hospitals, offering horticultural therapy to long-stay mental health patients. At specific inner London borough locations such as the Chelsea Physic Garden, Thrive offers supported volunteering opportunities for those with disabilities and mental health needs, helping them to take a first step back into their communities and become independent volunteers.

Although London has great wealth, some of its residents also experience significant poverty, indeed deprivation and disability go hand in hand. This is due to many factors but disabled people are more likely to be unemployed and the parents of disabled children face costs that are three times that of other parents. Battersea Park’s two neighbouring boroughs Lambeth and Wandsworth have some of the most deprived wards not just in London but in the UK and 17,000 of their residents are disabled or permanently sick. At Battersea, Thrive wants to increase the number of local disabled people we can help through our gardening programmes but to do so we need to re-develop our facilities. We are currently fundraising to create a new building and garden at the main site which we hope will be completed by 2012.
As a small charity, one of the most effective ways for us to reach out to disabled people, and teach the benefits of gardening, is through others. This may be through specific organisations who focus on one disability, through to health, social care and education professionals who are involved with them.

We offer a range of training courses aimed at professionals. This includes the only professional Diploma in Social and Therapeutic Horticulture in the UK, which we have been running in partnership with Coventry University for the last 15 years, through to one-day courses on a variety of topics. These include using gardening with those who have mental health needs or learning disabilities, engaging children with special educational needs, through to the use of sensory gardening to benefit those who have a specific disability.

We also carry out a wide range of training for specific professional groups such as ophthalmologists, teachers, care workers, mental health specialists and stroke or heart rehabilitation officers, as well as bespoke training for organisations like BUPA. We often deliver training directly on site at different organisations to their staff, volunteers and the disabled people themselves. This could be a hospice, care home for older people with dementia, mental health unit or stroke club.

Thrive offers horticultural therapy professionals working at projects access to the only quality standard developed for garden projects (based on PQASSO – Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations). In addition they can subscribe to the only journal of social and therapeutic horticulture, GrowthPoint and access a variety of specific publications and briefing sheets.

Finally, Thrive operates a small research programme aimed at substantiating our claims and supporting us in skills development. Over the last five years we have published research which includes – The Use of Horticulture in Secure Settings (Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, King’s College London), The Evidence of Benefits of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (Centre for Child and Family Research, Loughborough University) and Levels of Interest and Participation in Gardening Among Individuals with a Disability (Mintel).
Mark

Demonstrating that a visual impairment is not a barrier to gardening

“Undertaking any kind of activity when you’re blind often poses more challenges than when you’re sighted, but this has not dampened my enthusiasm and keenness to get my hands in the soil. I have always had an interest in gardening, and especially as it means getting away from computers and paperwork at the office!

“Faced with a large garden when I moved into my first house, I was really at a loss to know how best to tackle everything. With failing vision – I am now completely blind – I turned to Thrive for help.

“My first contact with Thrive was at a weekend residential course for blind gardeners, where I became known as a seedling! It found me learning all sorts of interesting aspects of gardening, from lawn maintenance to potting on. We worked in small groups, there were lots of activities with trained and very understanding horticultural therapists. Learning by touch is really the best way when you are blind.

“In the last few years I have been part of Thrive’s advisory group and I have now started a local club for Blind Gardeners, ‘Gardeneyes’, with support from Thrive. I think that the greatest difference gardening has made to me is that it has enabled me to gain a skill, through Thrive, to not only put produce on my plate but also get a tremendous sense of achievement. With failing vision it’s helped me through probably quite a difficult time and I think it’s just given such a huge interest that I don’t quite know what else I would have done with a lot of my time.”

Ken

You cannot beat nature

Ken Tudgay took early retirement from a company where he worked for 46 years following service in The Coldstream Guards. His two great loves have always been working with people and gardening.

Ken said “When I finished work each day I used to take all my problems down to my allotment. I could leave my worries there.”

Working with the disabled clients at Thrive has the same effect. It puts any problems he thinks he might have into perspective. Ken said “You cannot beat nature (therapy). We sit and work in the garden with the birds singing and the sun shining and think, this is heaven. To me they are a wonderful family.”

Volunteering

Offering your time as a volunteer can be really rewarding and can help both you and Thrive. Thrive offers opportunities to both individuals and to groups of people, often from companies, to get involved. Indeed volunteers donate almost 13,500 hours every year.

Volunteers can be seen building stiles, clearing land, painting fences, supporting clients, through to gardening with Thrive out in the community. For example Thrive and a 30-strong corporate volunteer team from Price Waterhouse Coopers carried out a one day renovation and replanting of the roof garden at Joan Bartlett Court, a residential unit for the elderly.

The impact of the day was phenomenal. Prior to the day, engagement in the garden had been limited to two or three residents who were themselves finding the gardening a struggle. During the day, several more residents joined the activities. Since then, there has been a revival of interest in the garden.

“The atmosphere yesterday was electric and we’re still all on a high.”

corporate volunteer

Ken – You cannot beat nature

Ken Tudgay took early retirement from a company where he worked for 46 years following service in The Coldstream Guards. His two great loves have always been working with people and gardening.

Ken said “When I finished work each day I used to take all my problems down to my allotment. I could leave my worries there.”

Working with the disabled clients at Thrive has the same effect. It puts any problems he thinks he might have into perspective. Ken said “You cannot beat nature (therapy). We sit and work in the garden with the birds singing and the sun shining and think, this is heaven. To me they are a wonderful family.”

Volunteering

Offering your time as a volunteer can be really rewarding and can help both you and Thrive. Thrive offers opportunities to both individuals and to groups of people, often from companies, to get involved. Indeed volunteers donate almost 13,500 hours every year.

Volunteers can be seen building stiles, clearing land, painting fences, supporting

“The atmosphere yesterday was electric and we’re still all on a high.”

corporate volunteer

Ken – You cannot beat nature

Ken Tudgay took early retirement from a company where he worked for 46 years following service in The Coldstream Guards. His two great loves have always been working with people and gardening.

Ken said “When I finished work each day I used to take all my problems down to my allotment. I could leave my worries there.”

Working with the disabled clients at Thrive has the same effect. It puts any problems he thinks he might have into perspective. Ken said “You cannot beat nature (therapy). We sit and work in the garden with the birds singing and the sun shining and think, this is heaven. To me they are a wonderful family.”

Volunteering

Offering your time as a volunteer can be really rewarding and can help both you and Thrive. Thrive offers opportunities to both individuals and to groups of people, often from companies, to get involved. Indeed volunteers donate almost 13,500 hours every year.

Volunteers can be seen building stiles, clearing land, painting fences, supporting

“The atmosphere yesterday was electric and we’re still all on a high.”

corporate volunteer

Ken – You cannot beat nature

Ken Tudgay took early retirement from a company where he worked for 46 years following service in The Coldstream Guards. His two great loves have always been working with people and gardening.

Ken said “When I finished work each day I used to take all my problems down to my allotment. I could leave my worries there.”

Working with the disabled clients at Thrive has the same effect. It puts any problems he thinks he might have into perspective. Ken said “You cannot beat nature (therapy). We sit and work in the garden with the birds singing and the sun shining and think, this is heaven. To me they are a wonderful family.”

Volunteering

Offering your time as a volunteer can be really rewarding and can help both you and Thrive. Thrive offers opportunities to both individuals and to groups of people, often from companies, to get involved. Indeed volunteers donate almost 13,500 hours every year.

Volunteers can be seen building stiles, clearing land, painting fences, supporting

“The atmosphere yesterday was electric and we’re still all on a high.”

corporate volunteer

Ken – You cannot beat nature

Ken Tudgay took early retirement from a company where he worked for 46 years following service in The Coldstream Guards. His two great loves have always been working with people and gardening.

Ken said “When I finished work each day I used to take all my problems down to my allotment. I could leave my worries there.”

Working with the disabled clients at Thrive has the same effect. It puts any problems he thinks he might have into perspective. Ken said “You cannot beat nature (therapy). We sit and work in the garden with the birds singing and the sun shining and think, this is heaven. To me they are a wonderful family.”
Thrive began as the Society for Horticultural Therapy and Rural Training in Frome in 1978, set up by Chris Underhill, a young horticulturist inspired by his work with people with learning disabilities and his voluntary service in Africa. Chris was supported by, amongst others, Dr Geoffrey Udall a paediatrician who became the founding Chairman. The first grant was given to the charity by The Joseph Rowntree Foundation who actually donated more than had been requested.

Initially the organisation concentrated on supporting the people who were setting up and running specific outdoor projects and wanted to use the concept of horticultural therapy. It aimed to be a bridge between the world of horticulture and the world of health.

In the mid 1980s the organisation widened its scope by offering services to individual disabled gardeners and mounting a sustained awareness raising campaign. In 1984 it took over the gardening service from the Disabled Living Foundation and a public garden in Battersea Park which was the first demonstration garden in the UK, created specifically for people with a disability.

In 1989 the Reverend Dr Geoffrey Udall donated his family’s estate and walled garden at Beech Hill, near Reading to the charity. An army of willing volunteers completely restored and adapted the walled garden of Trunkwell Park and this became the Trunkwell Garden Project, which is now the flagship garden for the charity.

In order to put the organisation in a position to be able to develop its work further, cope with the increasing demand, and get it onto a sound financial footing, a major restructuring of the charity was undertaken in the late 1990s. This culminated in the building of the national resource centre and the relocation of the national office to Trunkwell Park in 1998, along with the change of name to Thrive.

Before his death, the Reverend Dr Geoffrey Udall made provision for Thrive in his will and this bequest continues to be instrumental in enabling Thrive to bring the benefits of gardening to increasing numbers of disabled people.
“Flowers always make people better, happier and more helpful: they are sunshine, food and medicine for the soul.”

Luther Burbank, botanist and horticulturist, 1849 – 1926
Thrive is a small national charity that uses gardening to change the lives of disabled people.

Thrive is registered in the UK as the Society for Horticultural Therapy. Thrive is a registered charity (number 277570) and a limited company (number 1415700). Thrive is grateful to everyone involved in providing photographs for this guide.


© Thrive 2009.

Cover and text pages are printed on revive 100 Offset, a recycled grade containing 100% post consumer waste and manufactured at a mill accredited with ISO14001 environmental management standard. The pulp used in this product is bleached using a Totally Chlorine Free process (TCF).