



Living well through gardening

Impact Report 2024/25

Contents

Welcome	3
Impact	4
Purpose and vision	6
Greg's story	8
Training	10
Cultivating Wellbeing	12
Celebrating success	14
Finance	18
Thank you!	19



Lucy, STH Practitioner with
Arun, a client gardener at Thrive London
(story on p.17)

Welcome

We believe everyone can improve their health and transform their lives through gardening. We see evidence of this everyday through our impact and the achievements shared with you in this report.



Ben Thomas

Chief Executive

It's been a fantastic year, full of exciting developments and stories of lives changed. A personal highlight for me was hearing Arun's story about gardens and our Life Changers programme supporting his journey to rehabilitation, positively impacting his physical, mental and social health.

Our Life Changers programme has significant positive benefits for those attending at London and Birmingham, and now at Reading. Enabling people who have experienced a life changing event to spend time in nature, connect with others and improve their health.

We hosted the 16th International People Plant Symposium, a key step in the sector's journey to full recognition and a fantastic testimony to our history and international impact. Individuals from across the world shared how they had put into practice what they had learned from Thrive.

We have launched a new app, Cultivating Wellbeing, to improve people's health through gardening in

their own space. Our hope is that in time the app becomes widely available as a wellbeing tool, particularly for those experiencing anxiety or depression.

This year, we're growing our impact further through new in-person programmes at our three centres and increasing engagement of the app through added development work. Our ground-breaking work with Trellis continues as we work to establish a new professional association for Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (STH). We're also launching Growth Point, our new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) subscription service.

This is all possible because of the amazing support of our donors, volunteers and incredible staff. I want to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to everyone who supports Thrive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Thomas'.

Our life changing impact

We reimagine and demonstrate holistic, person-centred care approaches — leveraging the power of gardening to improve health.



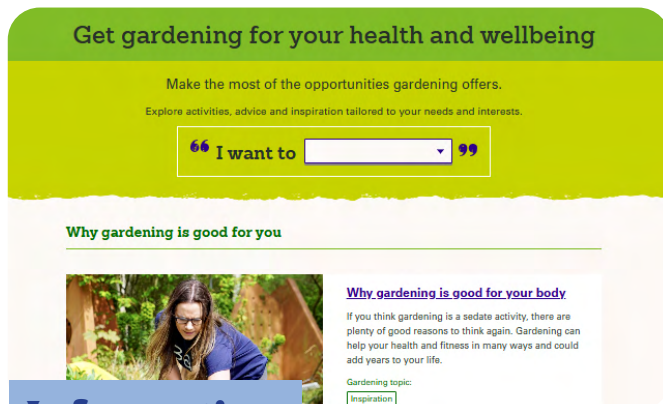
Programmes

Providing programmes for people with ill health and disabilities.



Training

Teaching practitioners and advancing professional standards.



Information

Sharing gardening guides for people living with health conditions or disabilities.



Advocacy

Working to get STH more widely recognised and utilised.

Numbers that changed lives



399

client gardeners
benefitted from



13,483

gardening sessions



251

volunteers supported
us with



26,709

hours



1,491

learners trained with
us to improve people's
health

As a result of attending
our programmes, client
gardeners were very
satisfied with our service.

100%

were happier or improved their mental
wellbeing

99%

socialised more with others

98%

improved their physical health

98%

spent more time gardening or outside

98%

learnt new things or gained new skills

97%

increased or restored their confidence

We're transforming the lives of people with ill health and disabilities. Driving a future where people can connect with nature and experience the life changing health benefits of gardening.



Steering the STH debate

Through convening the Therapeutic Horticulture Stakeholder Group (THSG), we are working to grow the use of STH. We are linking with national partners and researchers to identify and remove the barriers to scale and spread, publicise the evidence base and push for greater recognition and use.



Launching the STH Information Centre

Bringing together the case for scaling up the use of STH in the UK, we led the THSG in developing the Information Centre, which went live on our website in early 2024. This new influential resource, funded by Natural England, features the latest research and identifies steps needed to grow the use of STH in the UK. As well as influencing policymakers and commissioners, the Information Centre is having a broad impact benefitting projects and practitioners.



Using influence to grow

We met with Members of the All-Party Parliamentary Gardening and Horticulture Group (APPGHG). The Baroness Fookes DBE, The Baroness Blower and The Rt Hon. the Lord Rooker visited Thrive London to discuss the benefits of STH, the potential of scaling up and the challenges we face. Discussion points included routes into work, challenges faced by practitioners, vocational programmes and funding models.



Briefing key stakeholders

Growing awareness of the value of STH is positive; now we need strategic government investment to ensure our profession grows effectively. To engage stakeholders and push for greater recognition we developed a briefing paper. We used the paper as an opportunity to invite key figures to our centres to witness the impact of STH.



Building an Association for STH

To realise the potential of STH we need to establish credibility, through clear and consistent UK wide standards and training requirements. Over the last year we have continued work with Trellis to establish the Association for Social and Therapeutic Horticulture. The association will play a key role in supporting our emerging profession. Progress in the last year includes development of a code of ethics, practice standards and the entry requirements for registration.



Greg's story

Since finding us, Greg is thriving.

Greg, 31, was diagnosed with a condition called Global Developmental Delay, as well as autism, and finds it hard to talk, learn and interact with others.

"Greg was born after a difficult birth. He was starved of oxygen, and we lost his heartbeat for some time," Greg's mum Debbie tells us.

Greg lives with his mum Debbie and likely always will. Decision making can be hard for him, and he will often retreat to his own space and need encouragement to interact with others.

Since Greg has been coming to Thrive Birmingham, he has started to bloom.

"I was overjoyed at how quickly Greg settled in at Thrive. Everyone has supported him, making him at

ease. He loves it. It's his best day of the week," says Debbie.

Thrive volunteer Malcolm spends time with Greg in the garden and noticed that "when Greg first came to Thrive, he was very quiet and would sit on his own.

"More and more now he's engaging with the community that we have here. It's a social environment for him."

Thrive has supported Greg to spend time with others, make friends and develop his practical and creative skills.

“

To know that Greg is at Thrive in a safe environment is such a relief. He's happy, doing what he loves with people that appreciate and support him. Greg says people don't understand him, but at Thrive they do. He has come so far.

Debbie

Greg's mum

Debbie, Greg and Malcom in the Thrive Birmingham garden.



"I work with Greg, gardening and building items like bug hotels and frames," says Malcolm. "The level of confidence that it drives in him, is rewarding for him."

Greg loves being at Thrive close to nature. It's where he feels comfortable and happy with people that care and understand him.

Debbie says Greg's communication skills have improved since coming to Thrive. "At one time, we'd ask him what he has been doing during the day, and he'd just say, "lots of things". But now he's telling me what he's been doing, who he's been working with and sharing the jokes they've had," she said.

"To know that Greg is at Thrive in a safe environment is such a relief. He's happy, doing what he loves with people that appreciate and support him. Greg says people don't understand him, but at Thrive they do. He has come so far."



Watch

Greg's mum, Debbie, talks about the difference Thrive has made to their lives.

Training

We're experts at helping individuals and organisations use STH to help others.

Graduates advance the sector

12 higher education students graduated in November 2024 as qualified STH Practitioners. Since re-accrediting our Award and Diploma with Open College Network London in 2021 we have delivered 55 learners to the emerging sector.

We are grateful to the John Weightman family for their continued support of the diploma bursary.

We've also been awarded Assured Status demonstrating our commitment to excellence in delivery, assessment and internal quality assurance, and that learners receive a high-quality person-centred education.

Continuing Professional Development

Over the year we have continued to align our training and education services to the development of professionalism in our sector. We plan to launch Growth Point, a new Continuing Professional Development subscription service to ensure a professional level of CPD is constantly available within our sector.



We see significant and lasting impact through the programmes we deliver and in those run by the people that we support and train. Our training creates an opportunity to expand STH's reach so that more people can experience the benefits.

Damien Newman

Training, Education and Consultancy Manager

Key minds collaborate

We brought together key minds at the 16th International People Plant Symposium in July 2024 to encourage, support and increase the use of STH and other nature-based interventions. With the theme of 'Cultivation of Human Health Through Horticulture', the symposium was co-convened with the Horticultural Therapy Institute and Konkuk University.

As the host, we welcomed the significant impact gardening for health is having in fields around the world, highlighting the potential to scale up. Packed with over 35 presentations including posters and garden tours, delegates heard global perspectives on the impact of plants on human health.



Bex's story

Diploma graduate Bex Warrilow graduated from the Thrive Diploma in 2024 with the John Weightman Prize for Excellence in learning.

Bex works as an Occupational Therapy (OT) Assistant at an NHS Adolescent Hospital where she uses STH as a valuable nature-based therapeutic intervention.

Since graduating, Bex has used her training to run year-round weekly groups as part of the therapeutic timetable and individual therapeutic horticulture sessions that enable young people to engage with nature.

"I'm able to support young people who may otherwise have struggled to engage in a clinical setting, and I have also used the knowledge from the course to design a therapeutic garden at the hospital."

www.thrive.org.uk/bex

Bex has always enjoyed spending time in nature and recognises its benefits.

"Bringing STH and nature-based interventions to the hospital is another way of supporting people. Interacting with others can make people feel quite vulnerable, but there's no judgement when working with plants, which particularly supports those I work with in 1:1 sessions."

There's a lot of research about how being in an unnatural hospital environment can have a negative effect on your mental health, Bex explains.

"Even if people don't want to engage in gardening, coming along to the sessions supports them to experience both a nature and social connection. After a while they often start to get involved and you begin to see the wonder in their faces."

Since delivering the weekly sessions as part of the therapeutic timetable there have been multiple health benefits.

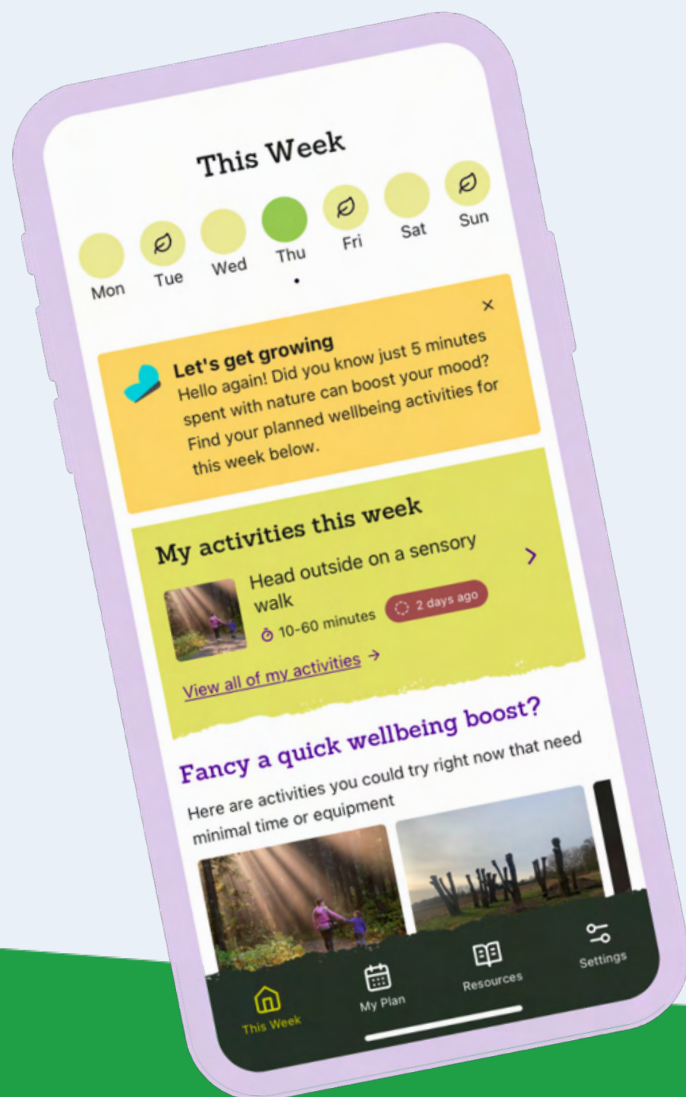
"Even when someone isn't feeling very good, they know through our sessions that going outside will help them to regulate their emotions. Engaging in therapeutic horticulture has helped them have conversations they haven't felt able to have in the hospital's clinical setting, because they feel more comfortable outside, while engaged and connected with nature and experiencing the physiological benefits."

Bex hopes to work full time as an STH practitioner in the future, and as well as the weekly and individual sessions, Bex also plans to run post meal support sessions for young people who are on an eating disorder pathway.



Cultivating Wellbeing

Introducing the first **gardening for health** app



Our new Cultivating Wellbeing app launched in February 2025 to help people garden their way to better health. Subscribers can create a personalised garden and nature wellbeing plan, choose from seasonally relevant activities, record thoughts in a reflection diary and get gentle motivation to keep on track.

As part of our information service, which includes the 'Get Gardening' section of our website, the app was developed for adults who want to improve their physical or mental health while benefitting from advice and encouragement to help them manage independently. The app is a supportive tool for people coming off STH programmes as well as for health referrals and wellbeing plans.

Since development, Cultivating Wellbeing has helped users incorporate gardening and time in nature into their routines and enhanced their knowledge, skills, self-confidence and passion for gardening. Users of the app are more aware of the benefits of gardening and the impact on their health and wellbeing.



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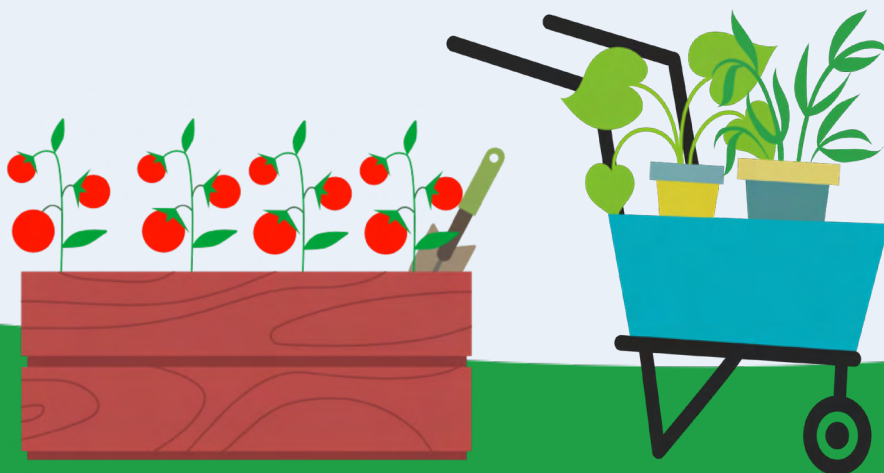
It's given me much more insight to how being outside can affect my mental wellbeing and how much happier I am.

App Reviewer

During the pilot, we worked with the Green Exercise Team at the University of Essex to evaluate the app. We also attained a high score of 82% from The Organisation for the Review of Care and Health Apps (ORCHA); Cultivating Wellbeing reaches the quality level necessary for inclusion in ORCHA's digital health libraries.

Available from the Apple App Store and Google Play Store, this is the first gardening for health and wellbeing app on the digital market. We have exciting plans for how we can get more people using the app, as well as new features that will support engagement.

Download



Celebrating success



Kyra, Community Engagement Officer, running pond dipping at a Community Open Day

The National Lottery Heritage Fund project

Funding by The National Lottery Heritage Fund has enabled us to improve the gardens at Thrive Birmingham. The inspirational two-year project running from 2023 to 2025 has seen the launch of the Growing Out programme and improvements to access, signage and literature to reveal the garden's rich heritage, including a new map.

We have also opened the gardens beyond client delivery sessions and are excited to share this space with the community at weekends with guided garden tours, events and activities.



Therapy ponies pay a visit to client gardeners and volunteers at Thrive Birmingham

The successful Growing Out programme continues to provide weekly gardening sessions for women who are experiencing anxiety, depression or other forms of mental ill health.

Holiday club gets green thumbs up

Children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities had great fun at Thrive Reading's holiday club in the summer of 2024. Smiles grew all round with gardening activities, growing, nature walks, bug hunts, garden games and crafts. The green thumbs up means the holiday club is back for 2025!

New Sanctuary Garden opening

A new 'Sanctuary Garden' opens in June 2025 at Thrive London to support older, vulnerable people with a range of sensory and mobility needs, especially those with dementia and their carers.

The garden's peaceful environment offers a place for gentle activity, conversation, quiet reflection and enjoyment of wildlife and the changing seasons.

As well as supporting the local community, the Sanctuary Garden will be a focal point for Thrive London's Garden Thyme programme for people living with dementia or memory loss.

“

I can see the difference the sessions have made straight away in how my mother is much more present and engaged. She is happy and content, and more alert which is visible to see in her eyes. When I pick her up, she has the biggest smile on her face.

Carer of client gardener

Garden Thyme programme



Sarah, Head of Client Services with Alex, Client and Garden Manager at BBC Gardeners' World Live

Award-winning garden at BBC Gardeners' World Live

We won a Gold award for our Beautiful Border at BBC Gardeners' World Live in June 2024 at the NEC Birmingham. 100,000 visitors were inspired by the miniature show garden's wildlife theme that promoted nature's positive mental health benefits.

Designed by Alexandra Bailey, Client and Garden Manager at Thrive Birmingham, in collaboration with client gardeners, the border offered a place to pause, rest and reflect with nature while supporting pollinators and stimulating the senses.

Changing lives

Multiple benefits for people living with life changing health conditions were achieved through the Life Changers programme at all our centres. Participants reported increased levels of confidence, physical health, mental wellbeing, stamina, mobility and activity.

The programme for people living with a life changing illness, injury or long-term health condition is up and running at London and Reading and is re-opening in Birmingham this summer for 2025.

80%

of participants leave happier or with improved mental wellbeing and physical health.

The Life Changers group sowing seeds in the Thrive Reading glasshouse



“

I came to Thrive with so much confusion in my head, busy thoughts, despair and sadness. After seeing the life cycle of plants, I found it very reassuring and put things into perspective. It's ok to let go of things; it's much like plants losing their leaves.

Client gardener

Life Changers programme

Our big Christmas challenge

We raised an incredible £37,640 for the 2024 Christmas Campaign, our biggest fundraiser. 257 donors supported us through The Big Give Challenge and by direct donations. The generosity of supporters keeps our impact growing by funding vital work and enabling us to respond to areas of most need. For 2024, the campaign promoted our Life Changers programme.



Arun's story

On his journey to rehabilitation, the garden became Arun's happy place.

Arun, 29, lives with musculoskeletal and neurological conditions and an inflammatory disease called ankylosing spondylitis. He experiences fluctuating health and ongoing symptoms. Arun received treatment for his condition in hospital where time in the ground's gardens was his favourite part of the day.

"My musculoskeletal condition affects my spine and joints, and my neurological condition affects my memory, cognition and concentration. Too much noise and people around me are overwhelming.

In hospital, I looked forward to being in the gardens. My neurologist also understood about the therapeutic value of nature for patient recovery."

Arun was keen to continue therapeutic activity that

involved gardens and nature, and he joined the Life Changers programme at Thrive London.

"I wanted to practice my physical coordination skills in a relaxing setting. Thrive is very helpful as it's peaceful, calming and I can be outside. Thrive helped me manage my symptoms, particularly my coordination, concentration and thinking. I also wanted to engage socially with people again. I practiced communicating with other people and built up my confidence enough to go back to work."

Thrive also helped to support Arun's mental health.

"It's made a big difference to my mood as it's very relaxing and calming. It makes me feel happy and a sense of accomplishment at the end of the day. I feel proud to know how to pot up and to identify the names of different plants. Small things like that have made a big impact."

Throughout the programme, Arun's practitioner tailored gardening activities to his needs and goals.

"My health fluctuates so it was helpful to have different tasks and try new things. There were accessible ways to allow me to participate fully like different tools and activities. I used to worry that my health was too big a barrier to do a programme like this."

Arun became a highly valued member of Life Changers. The group had a strong sense of comradery with a lot of support, kindness and laughter.

Gardening has become a big part of Arun's life. He hopes to volunteer at Thrive London and visit more accessible gardens with friends.

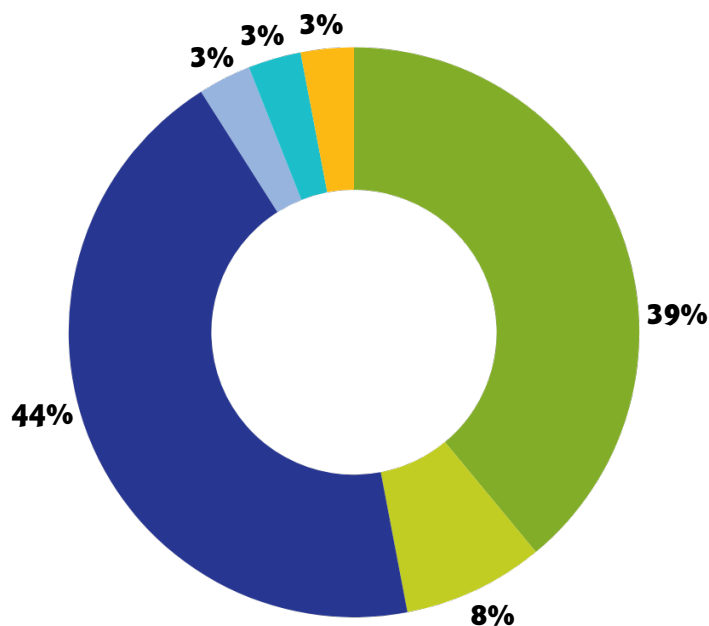
Finance

Income and expenditure 2024-2025

Income

Fundraising and Retail	£814,206
Services for Professionals	£177,645
Client Services	£934,453
Information Services	£55,012
Investments	£66,866
Other activities	£62,461

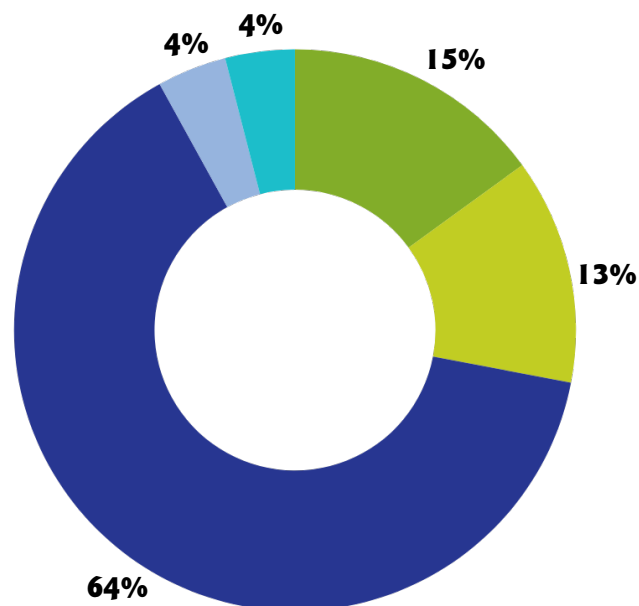
Total £2,110,643



Expenditure

Raising Funds	£303,297
Services for Professionals	£267,810
Client Services	£1,281,231
Information Services	£76,097
Governance	£77,933

Total £2,006,368



A big thank you!

Thank you to everyone who has donated towards our work over the last financial year and in particular to the following for their generous and valued significant contributions.

- A W Gale Charitable Trust
- Aitchison-Tait Trust
- Austin and Hope Pilkington Trust
- Baily Thomas Charitable Fund
- Batchworth Trust
- Berkshire Community Foundation
- Birmingham Fairer Futures Fund
- C Heber-Percy
- Cavendish Nuclear
- Champniss Charitable Trust
- Childwick Trust
- Chimo Trust
- City Bridge Foundation
- Co-op Local Community Fund
- Damson Madder
- David King Charitable Trust
- Deduci Limited
- Diana Startin Foundation CIO
- Drapers' Charitable Fund
- E Green
- E Holloway
- Eddleston Settlement
- Eveson Trust
- Flexible Bid Solutions
- Forest Garden
- Forward Carers
- Friends of Battersea Park
- G Wells
- Garden Media Guild
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- George Fentham Birmingham Charity
- Golden Bottle Trust
- Gosling Foundation
- H Properties Ltd
- HDH Wills 1965 Charitable Trust
- Julia Rausing Trust
- Kittle Group
- Leisure and Outdoor Furniture Association (LOFA)
- Liebenrood Charitable Trust
- M Lanyado Rodin
- M Meltzer
- M Watson
- Michael Marsh Charitable Trust
- Mobbs Memorial Trust
- National Garden Scheme
- N Warhurst
- Oldhurst Trust
- P F Charitable Trust
- Patch Plants
- Pearl Comms
- Peter Sowerby Foundation
- R Broadley
- R Cameron-Mowat
- Robert Dyas
- Rotary Club of Reading
- S Rutter
- Shanly Foundation
- Sing Healthy Choirs
- Shifting Gears on Brain Health
- Society of Garden & Landscape Designers
- Sporting Bears Motor Club
- Stevenson Family's Charitable Trust
- SVM Associates
- Swallowfield Horticultural Society
- The 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust
- The National Lottery Community Fund
- The National Lottery Heritage Fund
- The Scouloudi Foundation
- Truemark Trust
- V Roberts
- Vaultex
- Wandsworth Borough Council
- Wolfson Foundation
- Worshipful Company of Gardeners



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 **Thrive**
using gardening to change lives