

Muddy Boots Therapeutic Garden January-July 2021



A story of successful engagement and project development

Throughout the period of lock-down, the Muddy Boots garden was maintained by a few gardeners coming separately or in couples who shared a home. As lock-down eased, we decided to invite back first of all our “regulars” and we had a few very happy mornings doing a little gardening and enjoying each other’s company in a socially distanced manner.

In preparation for re-opening to others in the community as a “Place of Welcome”, we have paid for five of us to have DBS checks, invested in plastic gloves and sanitiser and our welcome team are due to have some training from the staff of Burton-and-District Mind in managing relationships with people who are struggling with anxiety or other mental health issues.

On 10th June, we opened once again as a Place of Welcome and Jonathan arrived for the first time with his daughter who left him with us, anxious and asking for a paper bag to breathe into. We set him some weeding, which he loves, at the end of the garden and he relaxed into the work and by snack time was ready to come and sit near the others as we cut cake and celebrated Liz's birthday.

This was the first occasion in three years he had been out alone, unaccompanied by a family member. The following week, Jonny was back, half an hour early to begin weeding (which we desperately needed!) and has attended every week since, walking back and forth on his own. He has also developed a good relationship with Ian, who has matured into a most dependable team member, and helps Ian on his allotment as well.

Ian, who initially was interested more in building things than nurturing plants, now runs the allotment with Pat (a Branston Parish Councillor as well as a member of the Muddy team). They are now growing excellent vegetables and also cut flowers and plants with which to enhance the neighbourhood. In the last few weeks Jonny has also started an Ecotherapy course and has also gained enough confidence to move back into his own home.

Ecotherapy



We have recently hosted a twelve week Ecotherapy course in the Muddy Boots garden, taught by Nick, an experienced horticulturalist accompanied by a counsellor from Burton and District Mind.

There were ten people in attendance, although not everyone came each week, and the feedback was entirely positive, people saying that this was their first opportunity to meet others since lock-down, that they had learned

new skills in a supportive environment, that their mental health had improved: some of them wanted more and have moved on to another course at the horticultural centre in the grounds of Stapenhill Cemetery.

One particularly significant story was shared by a man who wishes to remain anonymous, but who has agreed we could share his story. It was provided with the permission of the course co-ordinator and forms part of his course feedback and will be sent separately.

A second four-week Ecotherapy programme has just started in the garden with a new set of clients. Liz and Chris interact weekly with the tutors of the course and the work accomplished helps the overall running of the garden.

Water



Usually, watering the garden and greenhouse in high summer is a constant, back-breaking chore, needing attention at least daily.

The Muddy Boots team have made some profit this season from the sale of plants, produce and jam, largely through personal contact and our Facebook page. We have been financially self-sufficient, buying our own compost, sanitiser, DBS checks- and most recently, a petrol pump to extract water from our borehole. This has been in place for several years now with a hand pump

attached, but hand pumping is too difficult for most of us and we have resorted to tap water to supplement our rainwater barrels- not ideal.

We have considered the environmental cost of using petrol, but as one gallon will supply our needs for over a year, we considered that worth not using drinking water, with all the purification costs, to water the garden.

Two weeks ago, Ian constructed an impressive water tower in the garden and installed the pump. It was entirely his own design and within minutes of completion had sucked up 1000 litres of clear water, filling the cube above. A tap and hoses can distribute this water anywhere in the garden. The intention is to board the sides and grow plants up trellis to hide the tower and prevent the accumulation of algae in the water.

Place of Welcome



We have opened fully as a Place of Welcome for a few weeks now and many referrals are coming our way from the mental health team and social prescribers- people tell us that they appreciate the welcome and peace the garden induces.

So many people with particular needs attended our last session that we have had to halt any new referrals for a while so that we can let people get established and protect our core team of regulars. It is very encouraging and heart-warming to see people who either had no previous experience of mental health issues taking interest in and getting alongside vulnerable people- and also to see previously anxious individuals encouraging newcomers.

Considerable planning and preparation is needed ahead of every Thursday open day in order to have suitable gardening activities ready with tools, plants and clear instructions for those who want to garden but may need guidance. We also have started to make safe spaces, some with toys for toddlers, and others with writing and art materials for those with different needs.

Eco-Loo

Several years ago, John built an eco-toilet in the garden which served us well, but is now mouldy and broken, was in any case inaccessible to anyone who was not physically slim and able and it also had no hand-washing facilities. This has now been dismantled and there are no toilet facilities at all in the garden; anyone in need of one uses the one in John and Chris's home next door, which is hardly ideal.

We need a purpose-built, wheelchair-accessible toilet in the garden with hand-wash facilities (especially important post-Covid-19) and have found a company willing to supply one. Rita applied for a grant to cover the cost from Severn Trent water authority, but this was not successful.

Ian and Jonny have fence-building experience and are preparing to work together on replacing the fence, which needs doing as a priority whether or not the toilet is installed, the old one being broken down. This part of the project is about to begin.

We have received some donations in the past and would be grateful for some towards the Eco-Loo if anyone is able to help us.

Ian



Particular mention should be made of Ian who joined us two years ago when we opened as a Place of Welcome, struggling with isolation, depression and anxiety.

Ian has grown remarkably in his confidence and interpersonal skills and is now busy every day on the allotment, volunteering for Muddy Boots and, increasingly, doing jobs for others.

He is practically skilled, inventive, has a real aptitude for design and has become totally reliable.

In the early days, he could be difficult if things did not go according to his plan but now he manages collaboration and compromise with good grace. He has made genuine friendships which continue outside our group and is in a position now to support Jonny as he finds his feet with us..

We are very proud of him and he is justifiably proud of himself.

The team at Muddy Boots

July 2021

Useful web links:

<https://www.placesofwelcome.org.uk>

<https://www.burtonmind.co.uk>

<https://forestharcvest.co.uk>

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Homepage.aspx>

<http://www.broadwaysocent.org/muddy-boots/>