

The Children's **FOUNDATION**

Therapeutic Horticulture Project

Progress report

The Children's Foundation's Therapeutic Horticulture Project offers a cohort of young people with social, emotional, learning difficulties and complex needs the chance to undertake a Level 1 City and Guilds qualification in Horticulture. Led and assessed by our partners from Northumberland College, Kirkley Hall Campus, 6-8 Year 10 pupils develop independent and team working skills whilst managing their very own outdoor environment. The widely published and accepted advantages of outdoor learning include better mental health and wellbeing as well as positively affecting behaviour and physical wellness. These areas are key for the young people that we engage with particularly those on the autistic spectrum or with challenging behaviour.



As a result of the grant awarded by The Nineveh Charitable Trust we have been able to successfully expand the Therapeutic Horticulture project into Northumberland School, Hillcrest.

Hillcrest is a special school and as such an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP), or statement of special educational needs if the child received one before 2014, is a condition of entry to the school.

The exact nature of a child's special educational needs will have been identified through the formal assessment procedure by a range of professionals such as educational psychologists and specialist teachers prior to the formulation of an EHCP. Hillcrest caters for students between the ages of 11 and 19 and have provision to meet the needs of children with complex learning difficulties this includes: Moderate, severe, and multiple learning difficulties (MLD, SLD)/Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) /Speech and Language Communication Needs (SLCN)/ Physical Disabilities (PD)/Social emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

In addition Hillcrest pupils may have one or more of the following: ADHD, Visual Impairment/Hearing Impairment, Sensory integration difficulties, Tourette's Syndrome, Epilepsy, Cerebral Palsy.

For children who have problems in interacting with other people, understanding boundaries or coping in over-stimulating environments, the garden is a safe-haven that encourages interaction with pupils who share some of the same concerns. It gives a more physical outlet to explore valuable and transferrable skills, and encourages a change in attitudes towards their own abilities. Pupils involved have fostered new friendships, advanced in confidence and improved their attendance at school.

The project not only allows the young people to nurture plants and vegetables but grows confidence and aspirations. The participants are completing a valuable qualification; continuing their education, and where before the outlook for some was bleak we are seeing successes and progression onto further education and work.

Implementing the Project

As each school project is bespoke it was determined that a greenhouse, outdoor and indoor learning area would be required for the student tuition.. Therefore the project has paid for ground works, purchased and paid for a greenhouse as well as turf, gravel and plants. The students have all been issued with their own workwear – overalls, boots and safety gloves. Gardening equipment and tools have all also been provided. The Hillcrest Garden was a complete blank canvas and it took many months of hard work by the students just clearing the space before the garden began to take shape.



Once the students start their tuition and determine their units of study, plants and seeds are ordered. As this is a brand new garden once the students settle into the project we explored with them how we can develop the wider school 'Our Garden' element of the project which will create the Class of 2019 legacy.

What they achieved

The actual qualification that the students work towards is Level 1 Award in Practical Horticulture Skills in Partnership with Northumberland College, Kirkley Hall campus. The students, together with the Tutor and Teacher determine which 6 units out of the 60 potential skills will be most appropriate to them. Examples of the units include:

§ Preparing for sowing or planting under supervision

- § Determine soil PH with colour indicator test under supervision
- § Lift, divide and plant herbaceous perennials
- § Propagate by stem cuttings
- § Pot up rooted cuttings, large seedlings or roots by hand

After students have studied the varying units a detailed assessment occurs in which they are marked on their ability. Along with their individual unit assessments all students are given a written test on four of the units.

All the students bar one achieved their Level 1 Qualification. One student was unable to overcome the barriers they had and was unable to participate enough to develop his portfolio and attend the assessments at Kirkley Hall Campus. They did however benefit from the outdoor learning experience.



The grand opening July 2019. Huge changes have taken place in what was a blank canvas. All down to the hard work and determination of the students, staff and tutor from Kirkley Hall.