

# Style Acre

Supporting people with learning disabilities



## **Progress Report: Style Acre Gardening Co-ordinator, November 2020**

In November 2018, the Nineveh Charitable Trust generously awarded Style Acre £5,000 per annum for two years towards our Gardening Co-ordinator post. Please see below an overview of how the project is progressing.

### **Prior to Covid-19**

Prior to Covid-19 our Gardening Coordinator had continued to enable the people we support to enjoy the benefits of gardening, offering further horticultural therapeutic support and increased training and skills development for adults with learning disabilities and autism. We had 62 users of our Wantage Market Garden, 40 of whom attended weekly or more frequently. Across Style Acre, over 80 people were involved in gardening activities.



### **Impact of Covid-19**

Style Acre has had to make significant changes to our service offering as a result of Covid-19. Our staff have had to invent and deliver a new remote, socially distanced and limited face-to-face service. This service continues to develop as the pandemic progresses and restrictions change. People with learning disabilities and autism are particularly vulnerable in this pandemic. The changes to routine are causing heightened anxiety, people are feeling isolated and are struggling to understand what they can safely do and when.

Due to Covid-19, the Garden Project was temporarily closed through the first lockdown period in line with government guidelines. Our Gardening Coordinator was placed on furlough. The people we support were not able to attend Wantage Market Garden or our community day hubs for gardening during the lockdown period. Gardening work placements within our Green Acre garden maintenance team were paused alongside all other placements in our Work Programme.

### **Gardening through Covid-19**

Despite needing to focus on supporting people's primary care through Covid-19 and despite the challenges we have faced, we have continued to support both the physical and mental wellbeing of people we support. We believe that gardening plays a very large part in keeping people we support healthy and happy. As such, we have continued to focus on gardening as much as possible. Gardening has become even more important for many of the people we support during this time as a therapeutic and positive activity; people's gardens have been used even more for gardening during lockdown. People we support have particularly enjoyed making use of their Veg Trugs in our supported living households, encouraged to continue gardening by our support teams. Volunteers and support staff from our community day hubs collected and delivered plants, tools and seeds from our Wantage Market Garden to our supported living households so that people still had access to gardening during the first lockdown. We have also provided activities, ideas and advice remotely to help people garden at home and ran a gardening competition over the summer.

By exercising every caution as lockdown restrictions eased, our Gardening Coordinator was able to return from furlough to resume the Garden Project; a number of 1-2-1 and small group sessions have resumed at Wantage Market Garden. Additionally, a small

number of people we support who enjoy gardening and have been struggling with their mental health have taken part in new mental health sessions. People have taken up as many safe gardening opportunities as possible, subject to our risk assessments and government restrictions. During the second lockdown, our Gardening Coordinator is partly furloughed and has been providing guidance remotely to people we support; we have been able to continue delivering some regular sessions at the Market Garden for small groups in line with government restrictions, and some of our gardening maintenance team are still able to undertake their work placements.

### **Future plans**

People we support greatly enjoying being part of the Garden Project and the Gardening Co-ordinator post is highly valued at Style Acre due to the contribution it makes to the health and wellbeing of people we support. Gardening opportunities have been very important to people during the pandemic, whether this has been at home or at our Market Garden; they have helped people to engage in a therapeutic, safe and healthy activity. Whilst the number of people we can support at our Market Garden and hubs has had to decrease, participation at home has meant we still have over 80 people engaged in gardening across Style Acre. Our vegetable trugs, gardens and Wantage Market Garden have enabled people to utilise and appreciate their outdoor spaces even more in this challenging year. Everyone is looking forward to a time when we can restart our programme of gardening events and welcome larger groups of gardeners back to our sessions, and to continue the evolution of this valuable project that offers so many benefits, and so many ways to participate.



**Thank you for supporting this project**