

Foresight Gardening Enterprises CIC

Foresight Gardening is a charitable organisation established in 2013 with the objective of providing training in gardening and horticultural techniques to visually impaired residents of South Devon, while restoring the long-neglected walled garden of Teignmouth to its former glory. The garden is situated in a secluded corner of the grounds of Teignmouth Community School and some of the students there are also given the opportunity to learn about horticultural techniques and/or volunteer under school supervision. Figures from the Royal National Institute for the Blind show that 66% of working age blind and partially sighted people are not in paid employment. Devon In Sight figures show that over 38,000 blind or partially sighted people, of working age are living in Devon and Torbay. This figure is expected to rise by 43% in line with population trends by 2030. Many rely solely on state benefits to survive and a large proportion suffer isolation and loneliness. Research shows that loneliness is highly detrimental to health and mental wellbeing and that loneliness and social isolation are linked to around a 30% increased risk of a stroke or development of coronary artery disease. The Directors of Foresight Gardening have considerable knowledge and experience of the barriers faced by visually impaired people, but are also aware of their general interest and enthusiasm for gardening and the physical and mental benefits it provides. We receive regular bulletins of horticultural employment opportunities available from a variety of sources and are able to refer trainees to these as appropriate.

How your support has helped the project

In late 2019, no sooner did we start to catch up with planned activities and get the project back on track than we were faced in March 2020 with the barriers and restrictions of the Covid 19 pandemic. This brought horticultural training to an abrupt halt due to the need to work closely with trainees, particularly those who are visually impaired. However, with Police, School and Local Authority permission for each separate element we were able to carry out planned infrastructure work during both the first lockdown and the subsequent restrictions, so that once this dreadful virus has been banished we will be able to resume training of the visually impaired without interruption for major works and without trainees having to relearn the layout when infrastructure is installed. Throughout lockdowns students of key-worker parents were able to visit the garden (under school supervision) and learn about its history of the garden and potential opportunities for horticultural training. It gave them a break from indoor lessons and obligatory sports.

In April 2020 the Portaloo was installed and the electricity cable was repaired, restoring power to the garden and greenhouse. This means that refreshments can now be provided on site for trainees, volunteers and future visitors. Electricity also helped protect plantings in the greenhouse in the winter of 2020-21, providing both light and heat and also enabling us to operate power tools under shelter. In future it will allow us to extend the window for work during the shorter days. It will also enable the future installation of an automated irrigation system for the greenhouse and garden, maximising economy of water. We also installed the planned wheelchair access to the garden and laid tarmac to smooth the transition to and from the pathway. Although initially approved by the school, upon completion we were obliged to re-tarmac the whole of the pathway to the garden and beyond at an additional cost of £600, following a second inspection from the school.

Installation of wheelchair access



Before



After (pre tarmac)

Weather station



Installing a weather data collection point on the School's alternative education centre



The school reopened in September 2019 and, given the additional educational benefits it could provide, we brought forward plans to install the weather station in the garden. Students of the school's alternative education hub were delighted to be able to help with installation of one of the data collection points. The alternative education hub caters for students of the school with a degree of learning difficulties but who are able to participate in a main stream curriculum. It is now able to include the complexities of the Beaufort scale and wind speed, changes in air pressure, temperature, daylight and rainfall and how these impact on plant life, wildlife and

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the environment. Through scheduled sessions of working in the garden under additional school supervision and learning about weather, students are able to experience potential alternative career paths for the future. Visually impaired trainees will eventually benefit from similar teaching. The station is linked to the Met Office in Exeter as one of its response points.

Provided safety requirements and restrictions permit, we will eventually continue to host a number of students helping in the garden in the new school year as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award activities, undertaking charitable work. Once the groundwork is complete, there is additional potential for the school to take advantage of the Walled Garden in the future to enhance mainstream lessons in, for example, physical geography and natural and environmental science. With an additional screen based in the school's main building, data from the new weather station could also be streamed direct to the school, enabling live data to be used in a variety of lessons. The current Head of Teignmouth Community School is keen for the garden, while continuing its current work with the visually impaired, also to be in a position to play a role in the school's educational provision in the future. The school has acknowledged that students already involved in the project have been able to gain a better understanding of visual impairment and disability in general. Their knowledge and understanding naturally flows outwards to the community as a whole.

We are continuing with infrastructure work while horticultural training is on hold. Erection of the workshop was completed in May this year and will provide shelter and enable tasks to continue during inclement weather. Construction of the raised beds is now complete. We are taking further advantage of this imposed training hiatus to commence work on the planned polytunnel at the same time, allowing us to extend the growing season in future. There is more infrastructure work waiting to be carried out. When repairing the greenhouse roof in December 2019 it was discovered that some of the supports had weakened considerably and the footings were failing. Patching will have to continue for the time being. Having determined that a sewage system runs along the outer side of the wall, we have decided to install a disabled toilet facility adjacent to the coach house. This will not only eliminate the need for the rather insanitary Portaloo, but also cater for participants and parents of local teams taking part in sporting matches on the school's Astroturf. Thyme, golden thyme, oregano and lavender are now being planted out in the sensory section of the raised beds and we have just seeded a border near the workshop with wild flowers to add diversity and further encourage insect life. Near future work will include installation of a water catchment and distribution system from the workshop roof and a rainwater drip irrigation system from a height above the compost heap and demonstration and packing shed.

Plantings for the sensory garden



Completed workshop and raised beds



Community fundraising has been impossible while the pandemic rages and restrictions are tight, but we will continue planting, propagation and infrastructure work to ensure that as soon as restrictions are lifted we can resume our full training and education programme. We have already started a trainee recruitment drive for the visually impaired with a view to re-commencing courses in the late summer/autumn. The process is lengthy as potential trainees first have to be introduced to and familiarise themselves with the garden and its layout before an assessment of abilities and potential limitations takes place. Volunteers, both sighted and visually impaired are also being sought and the Befriending arm of a local charity has already referred a couple of their clients to us. The new owner of the local Cliffden Hotel, who has continued the hotel's tradition of accommodating the visually impaired on holiday in Teignmouth, has a visually impaired son himself and is actively promoting Foresight and the Walled Garden as a place to train, to volunteer or simply to enjoy the mental and physical benefits of productive activity in the open air. The teenage son of one of our contractors, also visually impaired, is currently negotiating with the Job Centre for placement with Foresight.

The Walled Garden is one of Teignmouth's hidden gems and, in addition to its providing a vital role in training the visually impaired, the Directors aim eventually to make it accessible to the community as a whole as often as possible through scheduled visits and open days. Your support has played a vital part in helping us to continue during these difficult times and is hugely appreciated.