



Life-changing: Linzi Clark, left, at the Horatio's Garden with fellow volunteer Jane Fletcher

How digging in the garden transformed my lockdown

By Linzi Clark

Having previously been an in-patient support volunteer at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital in Stanmore, I'd heard about the plans to create an accessible garden for spinal injuries patients. The garden is the fifth such venture by the national charity Horatio's Garden who create and nurture beautiful gardens in NHS Spinal Injuries Centres throughout the UK.

Desperate to break out of the monotony of life at home during lockdown, I got in touch. And despite killing every houseplant I'd ever owned, I became a volunteer gardener.

First day nerves

With great trepidation, I arrived on my first day to transplant 400 bedding plants. My fellow volunteers come from all walks of life and include an investment banker, an engineer at Heathrow Airport and a counsellor who, without fail, appears with a home-baked cake every week.

On that first day we fell into an easy companionship, squatting down to dig under the watchful eye of head gardener Ashley Edwards. My initial

apprehension soon vanished as I became absorbed in the comforting rhythm of digging and planting. With each plant liberated from its plastic pot, I felt the first stirrings of contentment as my laptop-addled shoulders unfurled in the warm sun.

Garden transformation

After that first visit, I was hooked. I became a regular and used every day of my annual leave to escape to my garden sanctuary. And every week, I saw transformation take place. Wide resin walkways replaced cobbled paths enabling wheelchair users and bed-bound patients to experience their first taste of freedom in months. Garden pods provided space

for visiting friends and family while carefully positioned benches offered solitude for patients to reconcile with the traumatic events that had led them here.

When the garden opened in September, with sadly no opening fanfare, we still felt immense pride. And as we swept up the first autumn leaves, the first patients appeared. Taking a break from their gruelling rehabilitation schedule, the garden allows them to relax and enjoy a few moments of solitude in a world far removed from the wards.

To become a volunteer at Horatio's Garden, Stanmore, contact Tracey McCarthy, tracey@horatiosgarden.org.uk

Things are picking up in Cherry Tree

Roger Chapman, from the Friends of Cherry Tree Wood, reports on all the activity in the park this spring.

• Litter

We have reinstated monthly litter picks which will take place on the second Sunday of each month for an hour starting at 4pm during the summer months: 9 May, 13 June, 11 July, 8 August and 12 September. Our last litter pick on 11 April yielded 22 bags of rubbish, including a considerable number of vodka bottles and a fire extinguisher.

If you bring bottles, food wrappings or plastics to the Wood please use the bins provided or, even better, take the rubbish home with you. Apart from the visual mess rubbish causes it could be contributing

to the increasing evidence of rats in the area, which we have notified Barnet Council about, and can be harmful to wildlife generally.

• Playground

A new path has been constructed around the playground. This area was getting very worn and the path should help in wet weather. A new group has started to meet to discuss playground improvements. Contact us if you want to get involved. We intend to undertake a playground deep clean soon.

• Planting

Our gardening volunteers are doing a brilliant job planting pollinating plants next to the orchard trees, protecting the



Improvements at Cherry Tree Wood Photo Mike Coles

to the increasing evidence of rats in the area, which we have notified Barnet Council about, and can be harmful to wildlife generally.

We want to thank all our volunteers for their litter-picking efforts and to make a special mention of the seven Duke of Edinburgh award students who have been litter picking every week throughout the wood doing a tremendous job.

• Sports

The newly surfaced tennis and basketball courts are getting well used already. The current white lines on the court are temporary lines whilst time is allowed for the oil from the tarmac to dissipate. The contractor will be back, probably during May, to install the permanent line markings.

The basketball courts are available to all. The tennis courts are also free but should be booked at <https://clubspark.com>

triangle garden with some hazel and willow weaving, exposing the path edges, which haven't been seen for many years, tending to the wonderful daffodil display by the front gate and generally trying to make a few improvements around the place. If you have ideas for other improvements send them to us.

• History

A detailed history of the Wood has been written and can be found on the Friends website at <https://friendsofcherrytreewood.home.blog>. Do send us any comments or personal reminiscences about the wood. We are particularly keen to see any photos of the pond that sat in front of the old park keeper's bungalow.

• Get in touch

There is no charge to become a Friend of Cherry Tree Wood. We can be contacted by email at: friendsofcherrytreewood@gmail.com



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