

THE EFFECTS OF ATTENDING CHERRY TREE NURSERY ON VOLUNTEERS' MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

SUMMARY OF OUR FINDINGS

As a project for adults with long-term mental health problems, Cherry Tree is continually striving to provide a safe environment with a variety of opportunities to learn new skills, socialise and improve well-being for all who attend. So, we commissioned a research project in which all willing volunteers were interviewed by another volunteer, to discover in what ways Cherry Tree has benefited people, and how it can improve.

Volunteers were not obliged to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with, and were given the chance to say how Cherry Tree could improve the service and support offered.

Here is a selection of the findings, based upon 71 volunteer interviews:

97% (69 volunteers) have learned new skills, the most common being propagating, potting and computer skills. One volunteer has acquired no fewer than 23 separate skills! Altogether, a total of 58 new skills have been mastered between the volunteers.

94% (67 volunteers) feel that attending Cherry Tree has affected their mental health in a positive way.

"It is good to be able to say I have a job."

"It makes me feel I am not alone in suffering certain aspects of mental illness."

"It gives me a reason to get up in the mornings, and I really feel that I achieve something when I work in the shop or office."

"If you are having a bad day, you walk through the gate and forget your problems."

99% (70 volunteers) feel that attending Cherry Tree has improved their self-esteem.

"I feel better now that I am here. I would be lost without Cherry Tree. I hope I give something back."

"I realise that I am not stupid. I have been made to feel stupid all my life."

"Cherry Tree has made me realise I am a kind and caring person. I wouldn't have realised that before."

80% (57 volunteers) feel that attending Cherry Tree has reduced their sense of isolation and loneliness.

"I have lots of friends and I am there for people who are poorly."

"Coming to Cherry Tree has given me a sense of purpose."

"It takes my mind off my illness."

"I felt isolated and lonely before, because nobody understood me. People at Cherry Tree understand me because they are in the same boat."

82% (58 volunteers) feel more independent since attending Cherry Tree.

"I would like to take up open employment...I would like to be a gardener."

"I used to be nervous of travelling on buses and working out bus timetables. But I am now OK and have travel independence."

"I was living with my parents when I started at Cherry Tree, but then got a flat and became independent."

89% (63 volunteers) consider Cherry Tree as part of their family.

"By the time you have seen friends and staff, you come back to life."

"It has given me a sense of belonging I never had before and helped me feel comfortable being me."

"This is my life here."

72% (51 volunteers) believed Cherry Tree could not improve the support it offered.

"They cover every angle. They care about you as an individual. I don't know how they do it, it's such a professional outfit."

"It is the one place you can go if you have a problem and someone will sort it out for you."

"It is good to be in an environment without social workers and psychiatrists."

"Without Cherry Tree I would be back climbing the walls."

Cherry Tree Nursery is a truly unique environment, and over the past 16 years, has helped hundreds of adults with long-term mental health problems.

Here is a selection of their general feelings about Cherry Tree:

"It's a sanctuary here and also a step back into the world. I feel safe here and there is no judging."

"Without Cherry Tree I would have gone completely under and would probably be dead now."

"I feel privileged to be part of Cherry Tree. It has given me a better understanding of mental health issues...you are not stigmatised like outside. Cherry Tree treats everyone equally."

"I am very grateful that there are people like Jess...they are doing it out of kindness rather than financial reward. If it wasn't here, more people would be in St Ann's."

"I hope it doesn't close. I couldn't cope if it closed."

"I have begun to feel like work, it is a pleasure coming here."

"I have never been sick once since coming here."

"Since being here I have organised two trips to the Lake District and had a holiday in France."

"For me, a life without Cherry Tree is a life not worth living."

THE BIGGEST KILLER IS LONELINESS. ONCE VOLUNTEERS HAVE COME TO CHERRY TREE, THEY NO LONGER HAVE TO FEEL ALONE.