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ORCHARD VALE TRUST

**STILE  
GARDENING  
ANNUAL  
REPORT**

*[www.orchardvaletrust.org.uk/what-we-do/stile-gardening](http://www.orchardvaletrust.org.uk/what-we-do/stile-gardening)*

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# WHERE WE ARE NOW

*The story so far*

We've seen so many developments over the course of a year.

One of the biggest has been the surge in confidence of those working with us due to the support and motivation this project has instigated.

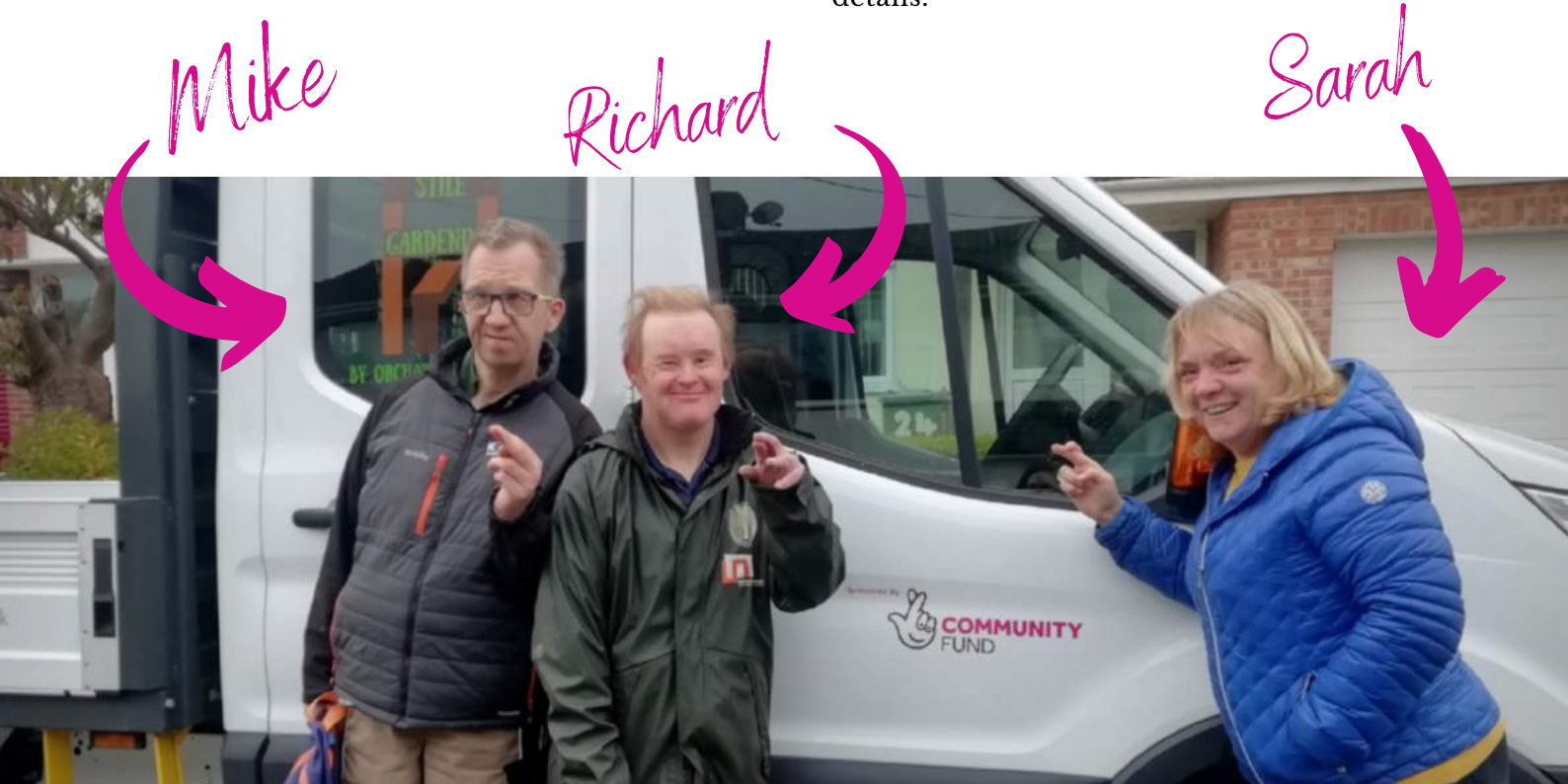
It has also highlighted the many deep-set barriers adults with learning disabilities face when looking to both integrate into society and find fair, paid employment.

This first year has made us even more committed to changing this.

A number of changes and developments have been made to ensure the general operation of the project is successful and making the biggest impact it can.

The most substantial of these impacts has been the outbreak of COVID-19.

The immediate response to the crisis saw a cease in all activity, ensuring the community and our gardeners were kept safe. However, now we are seeing a gradual and positive return to delivery of gardening services. Please see 'COVID-19' for further details.





## Stile Gardeners

The main objective of this project has been to offer adults with learning disabilities new opportunities into fair, paid employment through training in and developing gardening skills.

This has included developing a three tiered training programme, as well as tailoring job roles and new opportunities to those who have completed all the training levels.

As a result of this work we now have 1 fully employed Stile Gardener and 3 who are currently working through the training tiers.

What we have noticed over the course of the year, is the difference this project makes to people's lives.

We work directly with each individual making sure all aspirations are met and that the jobs are tailored to each individuals' strengths and development goals.

As a whole the project has been widely praised for its cutting edge approach and is said to have given people new hope and ambition.

It also brings the community together, in that it celebrates adults with learning disabilities offering useful and sought after services to the community, particularly those who are isolated, vulnerable and lonely.

Brightening up outdoor areas makes a big difference to our community.



## Training

The training programme that has been developed has not only involved upskilling people in gardening skills and equipment use, but also focuses on all elements of employment.

Job skills, such as time keeping, interaction with clients, how to present yourself at work and how to work well as a team, are all embedded in the training process.

The tiered stages also offer an opportunity for feedback, where we ask trainees what their goals and ambitions are. This helps to focus the training and the work experience to what it really is that makes people get up for work in the morning.

Up-skilling and introducing new equipment use has helped develop people's confidence and over the course of the year we have seen a surge in people's self esteem.

A change in outlook on their own futures and their worth within the community has also been apparent, which is testament to how important projects and opportunities for adults with learning disabilities really are.

Those who have been through the training stages, can see themselves how far they are in the programme, which helps set targets and goals for the next step.

Equipment	Detail	Training Complete	Level
Lawn Mower	Understanding use	✓	4
	Safety	✓	5
	Set up	✓	6
	Power on / off	✓	6
	Power on / off	✓	6
	Refill petrol	✓	6
Strimmer	Understanding use	✓	6

Orchard Vale Trust  
Supporting Adults with Learning Disabilities to Live Life to the Full

Review

I enjoyed: Independence - being allowed to get on with the job

The skills I used: general garden skills

I needed help with: Confidence with new clients

Manager comments: Will is maturing & growing in Confidence.

Next Steps

My next challenge: even more Independence

Activities that would help: Doing jobs alone.

Manager comments: Will can be even more Independent



Goals and Aspirations

Paid employment, looking for jobs, doing business side

q2 stuff

How to achieve them

Keep working, work well with Mike, work with Mike about quotes, work on spreadsheet

What support you need from OVT

guidance with quotes and quoting



# INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

The project has blossomed since the very start with enthusiasm from all corners of our local community.

Not only are we supported by members of the public, in that our services are sought after and we now have a stream of regular gardening jobs, but other organisations and companies around Somerset are also offering support, and asking for ours.

As part of a wellbeing initiative, organised by the CCG in Somerset, we were asked to present the work that we have achieved and how it impacts on the wellbeing of the gardeners, but also the members of the community who receive our services.

One of our experienced Stile Gardeners gave this presentation to a substantial audience representing all the leading organisations in Somerset.

This was a huge achievement for this individual. The confidence he has developed since the project started is phenomenal and knock on effects to his mental health are visible.

The presentation showcased the impact Stile Gardening has, and since then has received much interest from the organisations that attended.

Below you will find more about how we are involving and engaging with our community.

*Phil*



## Partnerships

Over the course of operation we have built many relationships and partnerships throughout the community that have resulted in Stile Gardening delivering a meaningful and memorable service.

We have built a strong relationship with the construction company, Melhuish and Saunders, based in Glastonbury, who have pledged a donation of bespoke uniforms to Stile Gardening throughout the life-span of the project.

This has not only given the gardening service a professional look and safe clothing in which to garden with, but has also inspired those training and working for Stile Gardening, bringing the team together and forming a strong bond between those whose goal is paid employment and respect from society and the local community.

This partnership has also helped develop Stile Gardening's community presence, as it has featured in a number of local news stories and now has ties and contacts to the local press.

Another significant partnership has been that with the Supported Employment Programme led by Discovery.

The reason this partnership has been successful is that adults with learning disabilities accessing the supported employment programme, show interest in employment and already have set of goals they are aiming to achieve. We work together with the support they receive to tailor training and to support each individual to achieve those goals.

Additionally, the relationship between Stile Gardening and the Community Connectors throughout Somerset has helped in bringing forward those most vulnerable in the community.

This has meant that the jobs Stile Gardening takes on can focus on those most in need in our community. Elderly people, single mothers, people living with disabilities, are all amongst our gardening clients and as a result, the service we provide has impacted on many levels.

Building contractor gives Orchard Vale Trust in Wookey thumbs up for National Volunteers Week



## Work Experience

We knew this project would be popular within the local community, but we had not accounted for the huge interest it has gained from SEN schools in Somerset.

Over the last year, we decided to reach out to a number of schools to deliver talks and assemblies to children with learning disabilities.

We talked about futures, goals and work opportunities and gave pupils an idea about the different training levels that could be achieved.

This slowly developed into offering work experience opportunities to Sixth Formers and college students, with the development of a separate programme for students still at school, but looking for the next step.

One significant gap, and barrier to opportunities for people with learning disabilities is the lack of support received when finishing school and taking steps into independence and adulthood.

By connecting with schools and offering tailored work experience, Stile Gardening is filling a deep gap that inhibits so many people from achieving their full potential.

We are really proud about this development for the project, with the next two years as a platform for this continued partnership with SEN schools.

It is to be noted that due to COVID-19 and the disruptions caused to Stile Gardening and the local SEN schools, this element of the project has been put on hold until further announcements are made and safe, risk free environments can be ensured.





# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

*Both big and small*

Our main aim has always been to break down the barriers adults with learning disabilities face when seeking employment.

To do this we must not only work to provide opportunities, but also work with the members of our communities, the local businesses, the schools and the other organisations supporting adults with learning disabilities.

Most of all, it is important that we work with adults with learning disabilities.

We are proud to say that all elements of Stile Gardening focus on involving adults with learning disabilities as decision makers, as project designers, and as the hard workers that make the gardening jobs so successful.

Stile gardeners who are training are involved in a review process every 4 weeks allowing us to structure the next steps together based on the interests of the individual. Once through the training programme Stile Gardeners are brought on in the jobs they want to work on the most, playing to their strengths all the time.

This is what has made Stile Gardening stand out and what we believe is the beginning to removing those barriers.

But it is not only adults with learning disabilities that this project impacts. Vulnerable people in the community who now have beautiful outdoor spaces are now able to enjoy their gardens again, impacting on wellbeing and mental health.





# CASE STUDIES





# CASE STUDIES





# WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT

There have been a great many successes throughout our first year of operation, but there have also been moments and challenges that we had not accounted for.

The most obvious of these challenges has been the outbreak of Coronavirus and the impact it has had, not only on Stile, but also on our community.

Although it will take a long time to recover from the impact of COVID-19, we continue to play a vital role in the recuperation process.

Other challenges, such as a change in the predicted client base and the way our schedule has had to meet the needs of our gardeners, have been

motivators in responding as quickly and as effectively as possible to all of our beneficiaries and participants.

A valuable lesson we have learnt is that we need to stay flexible in how we deliver our services.

One challenge that has been highlighted more than ever, is the volume of barriers that block the path for adults with learning disabilities.

Offering work experience and a pathway for progression as well as employment is only one element in the efforts to ensuring access to opportunities. This has been something that will help plan for the upcoming years.





## Challenges

### CHALLENGE 1.

When planning this project, market research was carried out in order to both tailor our marketing efforts and plot our projected income from the services we would offer.

The results of this market research showed that businesses and community spaces would be those most likely to employ our services and would become regular clients. With this in mind projections based on what other companies charged in the area helped formulate a target income, which in turn also allowed us to estimate how long it would take for the project to become sustainable.

Although Stile Gardening has secured a number of recurring jobs with local businesses, larger spaces have not been the main user audience. In fact, it has been smaller, private homes that have dominated our job books.

This has both positive and negative results on the project as a whole.

It has been positive in that it has reached a far wider, and more personalised, audience than was initially imagined. The impact on the local community has been huge, with changes to people's mental health, but also in reaching people who are isolated and disconnected from the community, specifically those who would not access community spaces and local businesses.

We now have regular contact with people who have been in need of support for many years, not only clearing and maintaining garden spaces, but offering socialisation and connections to those most vulnerable.

The negative side has been that we are not able to charge the predicted amount we had set out with. We have tried to price jobs with the client in mind, making the service accessible, but still sustainable.





**SOLUTION 1.**

To tackle this challenge and to make sure we meet our income targets we are working on marketing strategies to draw in more businesses and community spaces.

This had already begun prior to writing this annual report, however due to COVID-19 the new larger bookings have had to remain on hold.

We have also tried to meet this challenge with a dynamic solution. If Stile Gardening is a service that is attracting private gardens of those who are vulnerable and in need, then why not offer our gardening services to business who support those in need.

As a result we are now bringing in clients such as elderly care homes, SEN schools and supported living accommodation.

Although the price of the service must still remain affordable, we believe this will boost the projected income and will set us back to our targets of self sustainability.

It is also worth mentioning that regular clients and reliable income sources took some time at the beginning of the project, which impacted our income in the first 'set-up' months. Marketing plans and strategies played a large part in gaining a reputable name in Somerset, as well as getting our objectives across.

Coming into our second year of delivery, we are very busy with jobs scheduled every day of the week.

Our reputation has sky rocketed as a result of the personalised touch we deliver. It is thanks to the smaller jobs and more community focused jobs that we have become well known throughout Somerset.



## CHALLENGE 2

Our second biggest challenge has been to overcome the ingrained assumptions of what adults with learning disabilities are capable of.

This goes as much for the community as it does for adults with learning disabilities themselves.

Changing that assumption with regard to the community has been easy, in that the work that is completed by our Stile Gardeners is always impeccable. In fact, 96%\* of all our clients have requested for us to come back and maintain their gardens on a regular basis.

It is changing this assumption in adults with learning disabilities themselves that has proven more difficult.

A disconnect with society and community has ingrained an idea that people with disabilities cannot offer anything worthwhile to the community.

This has had a huge impact on people's self esteem and self belief, to an extent that we had not been prepared for.

## SOLUTION 2

As part of an organisations that has supported adults with learning disabilities for over 30 years, we have a number of different solutions to ensure people start believing in themselves again.

As mentioned previously, this is much more than simply providing an opportunity.

Working closely with each individual to map out goals and where they see themselves in 3 years is an important stage of Stile Gardening. This allow us to support the development of each individual and to help steer it in the direction they see themselves going in.

Collaborating with partners is also important when working with adults with learning disabilities. The most successful cases have been as a result of cooperative support for each individual.

Tailoring the training and the hands on work experience are proving to be the key in building self esteem and confidence.



\*The remaining 4% only wanted a one-off service based on something being removed and disposed of (so technically its 100%)



## Challenge: COVID-19

The outbreak of a pandemic has had a huge impact across the world.

For Stile Gardening it has meant a temporary cease in operations, putting developments and discussions on hold, and ultimately, a long-term change in delivery.

Once the government announcement was made all Stile Gardening services were cancelled with a commitment to stay in touch with our clients.

The Stile Gardeners were asked to stay at home and to follow the government guidance.

Mike, our head gardener, was deployed as an employee of Orchard Vale Trust and Stile Gardening to support the community throughout the lockdown period.

Using our Stile Gardening van, Mike was able to provide support by shopping, picking up prescriptions and other essential items for those most vulnerable in our community.

Throughout this period we worked closely with our partners and neighbours, Wookey Hub, who offered shopping deliveries to residents of the Wookey village. We contributed in making deliveries and picking up wholesale items to be dispersed.

As an organisation supporting adults with learning disabilities we also operate and deliver care to 4 residential homes across Somerset, all of which were locked down throughout this period.

Essential shopping, prescriptions and emergency transport was facilitated by Mike and our Stile Gardening van throughout this period.

with the gradual easing of lockdown measures, we have started to offer Stile Gardening service again and have been inundated with gardening requests.

See below a brief outline of how we have responded. We also have clear and in depth risk assessments of each site we work on and each stile gardener

### What we are doing to stay safe in Stile

We are adhering to all Government guidelines during the coronavirus pandemic.

This means we have put in extra restrictions and are taking extra care whilst delivering our gardening services.

Here is what we are doing to make sure both you and our gardening team stay safe:

- All gardeners travel to and from the gardening jobs in separate vehicles and do not meet prior to or after any jobs
- PPE, such as masks, are worn should any work take place within 2 metres of the team, or anyone else
- Social distancing is enforced and maintained for the duration of all gardening jobs
- There will be no contact between gardeners and clients and all communication will be done over the phone
- Invoices will be sent via post to ensure no contact is had
- All waste collections that are not directly a result of gardening jobs are on hold until further notice
- We are continuously revising all our guidelines to ensure they are up to date



## COVID-19 How we have adapted

On a longer-term scale, COVID-19 has meant we have had to move our Day Services from the residential site at East Court.

Although we have managed to do this successfully, it has had a huge impact on our gardening projects.

East Court has 5 acres of land where our therapeutic gardening project and our community gardening projects used to run from. Our new site does not have any outdoor space, suitable for these gardening projects to continue.

As a result it has been difficult to find a safe space for trainee Stile Gardeners to start off in.

We have met this difficulty by creating more in-depth site risk assessments and individual risk assessments, as well as a specific COVID-19 risk assessment.

This has enabled us to ensure the safety of all those involved, with regard to gardening and Covid.

It has meant that we are tailoring each gardening job to the individuals who are completing their work experience based on the skills they are developing. This can sometimes impact the time it takes to complete a job.

To meet this challenge with a longer term solution, we have already started looking into the possibility of an allotment. Although still in it's beginning stages of an idea.

This would mean:

1. Trainee gardeners have a safe space in which to learn new skills and build confidence
2. Reviews and tailored scenarios would be able to take place in a controlled environment
3. Projects and specific skills can be developed without pressure on and consequence to the Stile Gardening business





## COVID-19 How we have adapted

As many others have had to adapt in the current circumstances, so too has Stile Gardening.

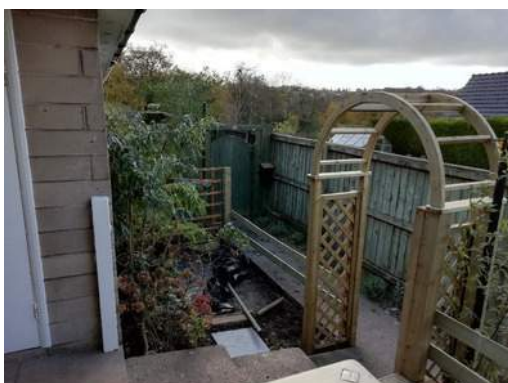
As well as offering garden maintenance and the usual Stile gardening offer, we have expanded into the building of outdoor sheds and garden structures.

The high demand in outdoor communal, yet sheltered spaces has allowed us to develop a new level to the Stile Gardening work experience.

Building Sheds, and visitor spaces for learning disability care homes across Somerset are amongst the new skills we have developed.

Ventilation and facilities that allow for COVID secure spaces has also been a part of this learning curve.

We will continue to develop to ensure we provide a safe and steady service to the community, as well as continue to support adults with learning disabilities to achieve their full potential.



# WHAT'S NEXT

The next steps for Stile Gardening include:

- Growing our gardening client base
- Growing our current Stile Gardener trainees list
- Diversifying our client base through targeted marketing
- Picking up where we left off with our SEN school partners when the time is right

During the last half of Y1 we were also approached by someone with learning disabilities interested in volunteering for Stile Gardening with regard to the administrative duties.

Our plan for next year is to make this possible, so that invoicing and other administrative duties are also undertaken by adults with learning disabilities.

Ensuring that Stile Gardening is lead by and developed by adults with learning disabilities is crucial to the main objectives of the project.

Despite the disruptions of COVID-19 we still operate a busy schedule of gardening maintenance jobs and skills training.

We hope to continue to offer this in the next year to come with many more developments and new partnerships to bring our community together.

