

Volunteering Story: The Yard Plant Nursery

The Yard Plant Nursery (The Yard) promotes therapeutic gardening within the Orkney Community. It's a Community Interest Company located at the back of Kirkwall's historic Tankerness House Gardens which the organisation maintains as part of its activities, helping to bring it back into community use.

The Yard produces high quality plants and flowers to enhance the community garden as well as being offered for sale to the general public and working with local retail outlets and organisations on planting projects.

The Yard engages with the community through training and education in the form of workshops, providing volunteering opportunities, work placements and employment opportunities.

The Yard is run by Dave Sneesby and Karis Christie and for Volunteers' Week VAO's Volunteer Development Worker went along to speak to them about the amazing work they are doing in the community and the importance of volunteers to the organisation.

The Yard currently has between 14 to 17 volunteers on a weekly basis from a diverse range of backgrounds, including marginalised young people, those with mental ill health, and learning disabilities.

Dave explained that they are currently supporting 3 young people between the ages of 13-16 who are carrying out a volunteering project to rebuild a small greenhouse within the grounds of The Yard.

They also have young people from Boys Brigade groups who volunteer their time at weekends as part of their hours towards achieving a Saltire Award, a Scottish Government award for recognising young people's commitment to volunteering.



Photo: Tankerness House Gardens.



VOLUNTEERS' WEEK

40th Anniversary

There's a lot of opportunities for partnership working with other organisations and community groups with a collaboration between the Orkney Scottish Women's Institute (SWI) and the Orkney Men's Shed currently taking place in the lead up to the 100th anniversary of the SWI. The Yard are growing all the flowers for placing in a floral display board that's been crafted by the Orkney Men's Shed. A beautiful display of yellow and blue flowers in a heart-shaped design to match the SWI emblem will go on display in the courtyard of Tankerness House Museum this summer. The Yard's volunteers will be involved in watering and replacing plants throughout the summer in addition to the growing of the plants.

The Yard have also worked in partnership with the Community Learning, Development and Employability Team at Orkney Island's Council to host a Sunday Funday during the school summer holidays. This has been a great opportunity for young people to explore the gardens, plant their own pots and trugs to take home and care for, and lots of other activities running throughout the day.

With The Yard's focus on therapeutic gardening they also work in partnership with Orkney's GP surgeries for Green Health referrals, supporting people to engage in nature-based activities to improve their mental and physical health. The support around this includes a 4-week course where people can learn about horticulture, propagation, go out on field trips and undertake projects such as planting bulbs at Happy Valley.

The Yard are also experimenting with new ideas such as using the plants to create natural dyes, with the potential to run workshops in the future and dyeing Orkney wool for sale to the public and tourists.



Photo: Some of the volunteers with Dave & Karis

The Yard works with a 5-day rota system where they match volunteers to the days and times that suit their needs, with volunteers usually committing 2.5 to 3 hours a day as many days as they wish. The volunteers are required all year round, with different tasks to fit the seasons, such as festive wreath making in the lead up to Christmas, bulb planting in the late Autumn, cutting back shrubs and general maintenance in advance of the growing season.



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Dave and Karis shared their experiences of the volunteers', explaining that it was a really relaxed atmosphere with plenty of opportunities for cups of tea and a blether, leading to many friendships being formed and reducing isolation. They also commented on the confidence that they'd seen many volunteers build up in their time at The Yard and how this had often led to them taking the steps to find paid employment. They also highlighted the transferable skills that volunteers gain from being at The Yard such as team working and cooperation, problem-solving, customer service skills, as well as the confidence that young people gain from being given the opportunity and trust to use power tools for the projects they're involved in.

The intergenerational nature of the The Yard's activities also provides a great opportunity for building confidence in young people as they learn and work alongside older volunteers. The inclusivity is also to be celebrated with all volunteers being treated equally, regardless of age or ability. All volunteers receive a t-shirt and fleece when they sign-up which helps them to feel part of the organisation as well as helping to bring out that sense of equality and inclusivity.

Dave and Karis shared how rewarding it is to see the development in people and how good it felt to be running an organisation that also helped others through its activities.

For the volunteers, being part of the whole horticultural journey at The Yard from sowing the seed to selling the plant is something that the volunteers find highly rewarding. The positive feedback that the volunteers receive from customers buying the plants that they've grown adds to that feeling of satisfaction and also recognition of what they've achieved.



If you've been inspired by this story and would like to volunteer or find out more about The Yard, please reach out to either VAO at aimee.harvey@vaorkney.org.uk or to The Yard directly by calling 01856 876809, emailing theyard.thg@gmail.com, or messaging [The Yard's Facebook page](#).



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