

EVENING MEETING REPORT - Lindengate Garden Charity

Sadly, our scheduled speaker had suffered an injury and was unable to attend, but Michael Harris from Lindengate stepped in. This is a registered charity situated next to World's End nursery in Wendover. Lindengate provides specialist gardening and activities for people with mental health problems. It arose in 2013 from a chat between friends, who discussed the lack of provision for people with mental health difficulties and conditions. They decided to try something themselves, with horticulture as a focus. They searched for a suitable site, and approached Wyvale, where a large area of old allotments beside the nursery was no longer in use. They explained their ideas and asked for two acres. To their surprise they were offered all five! It took a lot of hard work to clear the overgrown area and get the initial garden ready for opening in 2014.

Their mission is to improve the mental health and wellbeing of their gardeners through the healing power of horticulture and specialised activities, using Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (STH) and social activity and therapy. They accept people from all backgrounds, and anyone can be referred who can get there. They have gardeners with autism, a spectrum of mental health disorders, Alzheimers Disease, depression and post-traumatic stress. Only 24% are in any form of employment, and the scheme aims to challenge isolation and loneliness.

Currently there are 100 gardener places, 4 days per week with no time limit on how long someone can stay. There are 150 volunteers, and groups work with a maximum of 6 to one, and where necessary one to one training can be given. There is a team of qualified professionals, both full and part time, and the activities are centred round horticulture. Gardeners sign a contract detailing what they can expect, and what is expected of them. They grow fruit and vegetables and learn how to cook with them.

There is bee keeping, flower growing and arranging, pond management, a sensory garden and quiet areas for contemplation. Lindengate has become a recognized exemplar, and has won the Bucks Business Award for Enterprising Charity of the Year. Lindengate has a massive impact on the gardeners who come there, as shown in the two video films we watched. It has made them fitter, less stressed, enables friendships and socialization, in a non-judgmental peaceful setting.

We were all hugely impressed with the dedication and vision of all those concerned. How to help? Donate, join the supporters scheme, or become a volunteer. It was suggested that we could arrange a visit for next year to see for ourselves the valuable work that is done. It was a most impressive and eye-opening talk. (More at www.lindengate.org.uk)