



The science of the mind: investigating mental health

The Blackthorn Garden

Caption

Blackthorn Garden in Maidstone is a social enterprise organisation

Caption

It offers work placements to people who have problems with mental health

Vicky:

What makes me come to Blackthorn? The people for a start. I think Blackthorn is a place for community, it's a place about helping people get back to work, find friends.

Man:

I've suffered with mental illness for about ten years now and because of that I've sort of shut myself away, and the longer it's gone on, the harder it's been to sort of get out there and do things, and I thought this'd be the best place to start.

Colin:

I was shocked, to say the least, when I came here and found out there's still nice people in the world, and there's no judgement. Everybody is given a blank sheet when they come here.

Caption

Each morning starts with Circle Time for workers, co-workers and volunteers

Jan:

Good morning. My name's Jan and I shall be doing various things today around the place.

Rose:

Morning. I'm Rose and I'll be working in the garden.

Colin:

Morning everyone. I'm Colin. I'll be in the woodwork shop.

Rob:

Morning. I'm Rob. I'm in the woodwork shop.

Wendy:

Morning. I'm Wendy and I'll be in the greenhouse.

Andrew:

My name's Andrew. I'll be in the kitchen. For lunch we're going to have carrot soup, sweetcorn and cauliflower fritters with a bean sauce, and rhubarb crumble.

Caption

Andrew runs the café kitchen. He's one of the project's paid workers

Andrew:

I've been here ten years. It's a fantastic place to work, we cook vegetarian food, nearly all sourced from the garden. It's a holistic environment here so food plays a big part in that jigsaw.

Caption

John is another of Blackthorn Garden's paid workers

John:

I used to work somewhere where they sold the bread from here, and I got to know someone that worked here, and I came into the café, just popped in for a cup of coffee, and loved the place instantly. I volunteered here for about a year and a half, and got to know the staff here, and then when the job came up for the baker and I applied, and although I wasn't a baker they trained me up, and I've been here about two years now.

Caption

Rob's a co-worker. He's been coming to the project for fifteen months

Rob:

I found Blackthorn very therapeutic, very friendly, very supportive, and it's important for people like me who've had mental health problems to sort of slowly work my way back into the work process, sort of step by step. I'm learning new things every day, I mean working out in the garden I can use to you know work in my own garden at home, and sort of use the skills that I've learnt there. When I first came to Blackthorn I was quite a shy person because of my illness and I suffered quite a bit of anxiety and stuff like that, but being here it's sort of, it's got better as time's gone on, so I found it very beneficial.

Rose:

I'm not a therapist myself, I'm a gardener and I like to work with a team of people. The ethos of the work is that it's therapeutic to work with nature. We're not training people to be gardeners. I say that nature is the therapist, and the work is the therapy.

Rob:

I sort of look up to Rose as a sort of supervisor. She explains what needs to be done and then if I need assistance in doing it she'll show me how to do it, and I can learn from her, and I can do it myself.

Caption

At ten thirty each morning everything stops for tea and toast

Caption

Vicky has suffered from depression for the last three years

Vicky:

We're quite a family here so we all help each other out. I mean sometimes I get mistaken for a volunteer, so you can't really tell the difference between co-workers and volunteers 'cos we're all so tied together.

Geoff:

The first thing about Blackthorn is that when you originally come here it's, it's quite a nurturing, caring environment. It gives you a place, that's safe and away a little bit from the outside world, so you can get your head in order.

Caption

Geoff was referred to Blackthorn by his GP

Geoff:

I do three days a week here now. The sort of team spirit, the camaraderie that you build up with your co-workers, that is really good. Ray, who runs the workshop there, is actually very good at teaching you without being patronising, you know we've made benches, we've made doors, we've made all sorts of stuff here. That really has brought me back to a place where I feel comfortable, working here where you're working with other people, you're helping them through their illnesses, you're showing them things in the workshop, how to work a machine or how to handle a chisel, whatever, and you can see their eyes light up when they finally grab it, and you get a buzz out of that.

Caption**Colin came to Blackthorn after seven years of “hermit-like” existence****Colin:**

We have to be able to work as a team because if you've got a job that takes two or three people you've all got to be working off the same hymn sheet because if you don't, that's when you get errors. The whole thing about Blackthorn is everybody helps everybody else. We support each other.

Caption**By midday, the co-workers in the café are busy serving customers from the local area****Chris:**

It's a protected environment which is good for a lot of people who come here. At the same time we do have a foot very much in the real world which we're trying to take these people back into, and it can be very challenging, it's very challenging for the people who come here, challenging for the staff as well because you're holding quite a delicate situation, you know people come, are paying good money, they expect a certain standard.

Caption**Lunch gives Chris, WorkWAYS Co-ordinator, time to chat with co-workers****Chris:**

The point of our job in WorkWAYS is to prepare people to, to re-enter the real world of, of work and give them the confidence to do that. The co-workers here, they have formal reviews every three or four months and that's when we would set new targets for them, but we constantly see them informally as we're walking around and just chat to them, how are things going, any thoughts of work, or just updating whatever their plans were, so we see them quite frequently like that.

Man:

I like doing the work, the main thing and, and being around people at the same time, and it's sort of like getting me prepared for the outside world in a way.

Caption**The greenhouse is another of Blackthorn's routes back into the world of work****Wendy:**

These volunteers that come along really help us and get us involved with the other people. After you've been here a few months you really realise how much it's helped us in coming and getting out, rather than staying at home where you just sit and sort of do nothing.

Caption**The plants are another component of Blackthorn Garden's social enterprise****Rose:**

The fruit mainly goes into preserves. The herbs is yet another project, and they're drying herbs for teas and also making some oils and creams.

Man:

We've been expanding the customer base so that we sell to a lot of farm shops, and vegetable box delivery schemes, so it's great that we're making real food, but also helping people basically.

Colin:

Once Blackthorn gets in your blood, it never gets out. When I finish here in September I'll always be coming back as a volunteer because you get the importance of it stuck into you, and everybody wants to support it. I don't know, it just works. I don't know why it works but, it does.