

# WEA Courses at Thurrock Mind Centre, Essex



This partnership between the WEA and leading mental health charity Mind has led to a group of people with mental health problems who attended a Mind drop-in centre progressing from WEA confidence-building and assertiveness courses to practical gardening courses – and to designing and working on a new garden at the centre (shown before, during and after the work in the photos on the right). The group is now involved in growing and selling plants from the Mind centre and voluntarily maintaining private gardens.

Individual learners have been improving their results with each module taken, moving from passes to distinctions. Some are now moving into employment or on to other courses. Self esteem, confidence and commitment have developed as a result of their growing skills. They have also gained improved literacy and numeracy skills. Service users at Thurrock Mind also now have an attractive redesigned garden where they are able to sit and relax and have parties.

As a group the learners work more closely together and now understand the need to fit into the smaller and larger community. They have gained improved self-esteem through their achievements, and a sense of feeling valued for their developing skills.

Most of the group will achieve the level 2 certificate which will enable them to look for employment in horticulture. Their commitment to the course has enabled them look more positively at their own lives. Returning to employment now seems a realistic option to some.



## The Public Value of Adult Education WEA Courses at Thurrock Mind Centre

The partnership between WEA and Thurrock Mind started with WEA delivering personal development courses, including Confidence Building and Anger Management, to centre users. Mind already had a garden project, funded through Rethink, growing and selling plants to the public – and were keen to offer training to those working on the project. In addition, and as a result of the installation of a wheelchair ramp, they had a garden at their Drop-in Centre which needed redesigning. These two elements provided the impetus for the project, which involved bidding for Key Fund money to redesign the garden and delivering the level 2 City and Guilds (C&G) Garden Certificate course.

The success of the project has been largely a result of having the right people working on it. The tutor was also a garden designer and was therefore able to help with the new garden design as well as deliver the C&G course. Having a supporting tutor providing Skills for Life teaching has enabled the learners to take their exams with confidence. Mind already had a project and a project manager with an existing cohort of learners. This manager has been a key member of the WEA project team, enabling the project to continue throughout the week despite tuition being only one day per week. The C&G course is a theoretical one - but having the practical element of designing and working in the garden has enabled the learners to put their learning into practice from the beginning. The support of the Thurrock Mind Director to keep things on course has also been invaluable in helping to make the project work.

From the start the project has been a co-operative venture. Client users of the Drop-in Centre were consulted about the redesign of the garden and were involved in their own fundraising to provide extras for the garden. The learners have made decisions about the modules they have taken to complete the course and were clear from the beginning that they were committing themselves to gaining a qualification. They also submitted a group application for the Adult Learners' Week Awards – and although not successful are now pleased to display their certificate in the garden office. They also took part in a research project, initiated by the Department of Work and Pensions on the use of Key Fund Money. Learners and the Garden Project Manager were interviewed as part of this research.



The official opening of the garden at the Mind centre, conducted by Thurrock deputy mayor Diane Revell

### WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE

The Department of Works and Pensions will be publishing their research on the project during October (<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/>)

For further details of the project, contact WEA's Essex Organiser Sarah Moore on 01255 552967 or [sarahmoore@wea.org.uk](mailto:sarahmoore@wea.org.uk)