

## Summer Club 2019

This year's summer club ran between July 29th and September 4th (the start date was a week later than intended because of local road works affecting access to the demonstration garden in Holme Lacy).

A total of 73 gardeners came, with sessions running on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. We were again lucky to have good weather during the summer, allowing our gardeners to be outside most of the time, enjoying fresh air and sunshine in the garden.

As well as general gardening and harvesting of flower and vegetable produce, two other activities were available this summer for clients:

**Cooking sessions** – building on last year's cooking activities that proved popular with our gardeners, tutor Andrew Keir ran regular cooking sessions on Tuesdays, using produce from the garden and donations of fruit and vegetables. For one of our visually impaired gardeners (age 74) this was the first time in her life she had the opportunity to make jam - several jars of delicious raspberry jam were the result. Cooking sessions were supported in part by a grant from Herefordshire Community Foundation.

**Malvern autumn show garden** – gardeners used some of the summer club sessions to make features for HGP's show garden at the Malvern Autumn Show, September 28-29<sup>th</sup>. These included painted scarecrows made from papermaché, which were a particular highlight of our show garden, drawing hundreds of entries in the Peoples' Scarecrow Vote. They also made decorated planted wellington boots and plant labels, and grew flowers and vegetables used in the show garden displays, mostly raised from seed. Some of our clients were later able to help build the garden at the show ground, or see the finished garden during the show weekend. All of which enabled clients to feel they had made a substantial contribution to an important garden project for the charity.



*Two of the scarecrows made by clients – 'Lady Corn of the Cob' (R) was the clear winner of the Peoples' Vote*



*Aerial view of the charity's show garden at the Malvern Autumn Show*

## **FEEDBACK FROM CLIENTS**

Continuation of horticultural therapy through the summer period is greatly appreciated by HGP's gardeners. They enjoy keeping the garden in good condition, and seeing their plants through from sowing to flowering and fruiting. For many, coming to the summer club to work and socialise with others is a vital part of their life:

*"It's a long time otherwise with nothing to do"*

*"Growing Point has become one of the most important parts of my life. A real life line to me. If I didn't come, I would spend days not seeing anyone, and isolation doesn't help my mental health problems"*

*"Enjoy gardening, lots of good friends, very therapeutic. Better not to have a long break – adds interest to my week"*

*"The summer club needs to continue so that the garden is cared for, and existing and new friendships are allowed to blossom"*

*"Really enjoyed it!"*

*"B enjoyed harvesting, especially his potatoes, being in the fresh air, and maintaining garden plants, vegetables and flowers to continue production"*

Not everyone wanted to join in cooking activities, but those who did enjoyed it and some learned new skills, making jams, preserves and soups. Clients were keen that we continue cooking activities after the summer club. As a result, Herefordshire Growing Point will be participating in the annual RHS Big Soup Week in October and offering cookery again during the winter months. We are however conscious that our cooking facilities are currently very limited, and the cooking space in the garden house becomes crowded, which holds some gardeners back from taking part.

## **OUTCOMES FOR CLIENTS**

### **1) Benefits for physical and mental wellbeing**

We used a questionnaire (as in 2018) and 4-point scale to assess these benefits (Yes, a lot, Yes a little, No, Don't know).

As last year, a few gardeners weren't able to respond to questions because of cognitive impairment or learning disability. For those who could complete the questionnaire, a majority reported positive and mostly significant ('yes, a lot') improvements in their physical (55%) and mental health (55%). Social benefit was even more positive – everyone felt less isolated as a result of coming to the summer club, with 72% of people describing themselves as much less isolated and much more socialised with others.

### **2) Other outcomes**

About half of our gardeners felt they had a healthier lifestyle through being more physically active outside and eating the fresh produce they had grown in the garden. People also felt their gardening skills had improved a little, helped by tutors and, in some cases, as a result of working alongside other clients who are more experienced gardeners.

Shelagh Wynn (Trustee)  
Julian Reeves (Charity Manager)