



The Horticulture Industry Scheme CIC

Progress and Social Impact Report

December 2022

Our story so far

In April, 2017, **The Horticulture Industry Scheme CIC (THIS)** opened at the Charles Burrell Centre in Thetford as a not-for-profit social enterprise with Tim Melvin and Georgina Keatley at the helm. The plan was to employ former offenders or returning citizens as they are now frequently referred to - and to grow unusual salad leaves, herbs and vegetables to sell to restaurants.

For three years, we carried out this plan, both at the Charles Burrell Centre and at the Thetford Garden Centre and undertook some grounds/garden maintenance work for local businesses, as well as maintaining a few private gardens. In 2020, the pandemic struck and all the restaurants closed so we stopped growing produce.

We successfully applied for funding to undertake garden renovations for people affected by the pandemic. This included people who were isolating, such as older people, disabled people, those struggling with mental health difficulties and key workers, particularly medical staff – doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers. This service was wholly funded by some wonderful organisations so we were able to provide it free of charge. The scheme was so successful, that it developed into our ‘social gardens’ service, whereby we continue to help people who struggle to manage their gardens themselves, most often due to mobility issues.



A THIS participant cutting grass during a commercial gardening contract

Meanwhile, we continue to do commercial and private gardening work and our list of customers has grown and now includes some large, local businesses.

All our workforce are offered support in the areas that they may be struggling with, whether that be housing, with benefits, obtaining I.D., opening bank accounts, registering with a doctor, attending medical appointments, with referrals to substance misuse or counselling agencies, and so on. We started by working with those who have had contact with criminal justice services but now also work with people who have experienced homelessness and have other complex needs.



One of our social gardens – during and after.

From one of our workers:

“Everything you both do is amazing and I love working for you and always try give 100%, and thank you for helping me get this far to enjoy work and everything, honestly big thank you to you both”.

Our workforce

We have worked with 62 participants to date. Of these:

- 34 are either working for us or have gone on to work for other employers. 16 remained with us after their four-month contracts for anything up to two years. 25 left us to move into other employment in the following sectors:-

1. Horticulture (3)	8. Warehouse (2)
2. Construction (3)	9. Agency (2)
3. Engineering (3)	10. Retailing (2)
4. Self-employed (2)	11. Manufacturing (1)
5. Logistics (2)	12. Hospitality (1)
6. Removals (2)	13. Farming (1)
7. Warehouse (2)	14. Hairdressing (1)
- 34 have remained in contact with us.
- 12 have asked us to write references for them, which we have done.
- THIS has not been formally researched, but Thetford is a small town and we always hear news of our former participants ... as far as we aware, only two former participants have gone back to prison for new offences.
- 3 of our participants have been serving prisoners at HMPs Wayland and Norwich who worked for us during the day and returned to prison at night.

Finding work for prison leavers can be very difficult. According to the Prison Reform Trust's Bromley Briefings, only 8% of people are in PAYE employment six weeks after leaving prison. After a year, the figure rises to just 17%. This was a major reason why we set up THIS.

Our Projects

Social Gardens

Our social gardens started as a programme to help people impacted by the Covid-19 Pandemic. It was so successful that it has developed into a programme that helps people who cannot manage their gardens because of difficulties with mobility, aging, disability, mental health, etc. The visit, which can be for a team of up to seven gardeners for up to two days, is completely free of charge.

We realised that in some cases social garden owners were not going to be able to maintain the garden after our first visit so we successfully sourced funding for free return visits. In other cases we return regularly at reduced rates to help maintain the garden. Several of our social garden owners have become firm friends of THIS and we have given other help to them such as taking heavy items from their houses to landfill.

144 customers have so far benefitted from having their garden renovated free of charge

From a social garden customer about our workforce:

“Excellent people with a kind nature and nothing is too much for them. As stated, could not wish for better”.

From another social garden customer:

“When you did my garden, I fell in love with it”.



Removing ivy from a wall at the Gorse Industrial Estate, a Historic England site.

Training

Whilst working for us, our participants have undertaken the following training:-

- 2 have obtained qualifications (one with distinction and the other with credit) with the Norfolk School of Gardening: Certificate in Practical Horticulture, accredited by the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.
- 4 have gained LANTRA qualifications in stump grinding with Eas Tec College.
- 6 have gained LANTRA qualifications in the use of brush cutters and strimmers.
- 1 has gained a LANTRA Cherry Picking qualification.

Training (Cont)

- 22 undertook training in growing produce with Natalie Szarek of Audacious Veg and/or Beth Stewart of Forty Hall Farm.
- All our participants have received our extensive in-house training, covering all aspects of garden and grounds maintenance, including the use of garden machinery.



A group of THIS employees receiving accredited training in the use of brush cutters and strimmers from Eas Tec Training.

- Warren Services Limited
- Pearsons Capital Projects Limited
- Flagship Homes
- Evans Instruments Limited
- The Thomas Paine Hotel
- The Shadwell Stud
- R. G. Carter Construction
- Keystone Development Limited
- Gorse Industrial Estate (with Historic England)
- Onyx Interiors Limited
- Andersons Wholesale
- Peerless Plastics and Coatings Limited
- D. J. Evans Limited
- T. A. Property Partnership Limited
- Hughes Electrical

Commercial Gardening

As well as undertaking garden maintenance work for individual customers, we are proud to have the following organisations amongst our customers:-



2 THIS participants at a social garden project

Awards

We were very pleased to be runner up in the Thetford Business Awards in their Environment Category in 2021.

A few last facts and figures

- According to the Prison Reform Trust's Bromley Briefings, the average annual overall cost of a prison place in England and Wales is now £44,640.
- On average, a serious violent crime is estimated to cost society £19,000, compared to £4,800 for a vehicle theft or a robbery, and £510 for criminal damage. The average impact of a homicide is estimated at £1.1 million. These figures are from The Economic and Social Costs of Crime - Home Office Research Study 217.

Keeping people in the offending cycle within the criminal justice system costs the tax payer a great deal of money in conviction costs and prison costs. Meanwhile the cost of running THIS for a year is approximately £108,000 per annum. Apart from the significant financial savings that we bring, our workforce are contributing members of society. They earn money that they usually share with their partners or parents, and they are doing gardening work that improves the look of the environment. Gardening has positive benefits for mental health, and our team are doing work that benefits others. We are proud that our workforce are living useful lives and are contributing members of society.



Clockwise from top left: 1. Stump grinding training, 2. working at the Shadwell Estate, 3. the team working at the Gorse Industrial Estate, and 4. working at the Shadwell Estate

Thank You

To all our funders, donors, supporters, customers, Board of Directors and employees we are so grateful to every single one of you. We would not be here without you and we cannot thank you enough. From the bottom of our hearts: a great big thank you!

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- Thetford Shines Brighter;
- Your Big Idea;
- Change Grow Live;
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- The School for Social Entrepreneurs; ,
- Thetford Town Council; and the
- Unlocking Potential Fund.

Some individual people have also given us generous donations and we are immensely grateful.

Last, but not least – Simon O'Leary, our very patient (can we just make one last change?) grant application writer.



Tim Melvin and Georgina Keatley, co-founders of THIS