

EARTHWORKS AGM 2010

ANNUAL DIRECTOR'S REPORT

For the year April 2009– March 2010

The following report details the events at Earthworks from April 2009 - March 2010. As always everyone at Earthworks has put in a great deal of effort and hard work to help the organisation grow and develop. Earthworks is a very special place to work and meet new people. It encourages everyone, regardless of ability, to reach their full potential.

This good work would not have been possible without the continued support and commitment from everyone involved at Earthworks. A huge thank you goes out to all the trainees, volunteers, staff, management committee trustees and members and all our friends and supporters.

Report compiled by Teresa Gore, Earthworks Director (August 2010).

1.0 PEOPLE AT EARTHWORKS

1.1 Adult Trainees

Adult trainees of all abilities contribute to Earthworks including people with learning difficulties and/or mental health problems and emotional and behavioural difficulties. They attend between one and four days a week.

During their time at Earthworks trainees received both formal training (in the form of the National Proficiency Test Council [NPTC] curriculum) and informal training via practical experience and observation and instruction from others.

Throughout 2009-10 Earthworks was able to offer 44 adult trainee placements across the week to 35 individuals.

Trainee catchment areas:

St. Albans
Rickmansworth
Hatfield
Bricket Wood
Bushey

Welwyn Garden City
Borehamwood
Harpenden
Abbots Langley
Hemel Hempstead

Earthworks welcomed the following new trainees to site: Natalie, Vincent, Ryan, Chris and Stephen T.

We were delighted that Ben, one of our trainees who attended site on Thursdays, was able to secure local work. Although sad that he was leaving us to take up a work placement at Homebase we were pleased for him.

During the year a number of trainees began to bring in work diaries and communication books. These books allowed staff to record their achievements and share information with homes/carers/parents. In addition a grant from the Bailey Thomas Foundation helped us to develop personalised trainee folders in which specific work activities and achievements are detailed. The folders ensure that trainees have permanent records of the varied tasks that they have undertaken on site. This helps with self confidence and self esteem and may prove useful if trainees begin work at other projects and/or seek paid or voluntary employment and college places.

Throughout the year Earthworks staff attended the annual 'Whole Life Review' meetings arranged for all trainees by social services / local care providers. The staff were delighted to see and hear that Earthworks continued to be a positive influence in everyone's lives.

1.2 Young Trainees

Throughout 2009-10 Earthworks has run three separate initiatives aimed at children and young people with learning disabilities and/or mental health problems and/or emotional or behavioural difficulties.

Prevention 513 Fund

Earthworks has benefited from a £29,500 grant from the Prevention 513 Fund administered by the Children, Schools and Families division of Hertfordshire County Council. This money has paid for 8 – 13 year old children with special educational needs (from mainstream and SEN primary and secondary schools in the local area) to visit Earthworks and undertake a range of horticultural and ecological activities. These activities have been co-ordinated by Bianca Badham, a student from the University of Hertfordshire. Bianca has designed fun and interactive workshops (such as scarecrow making and construction of bird feeders) and other tasks that have helped to improve children's understanding of the natural world whilst also boosting their confidence and developing their fitness levels.

Countryside Skills Project (The "Summer Scheme")

The Countryside Skills Project was a short-term summer scheme aimed at young people from 16 to 25 years old which ran for four weeks in August 2009. It enabled sixteen young people to gain work experience and improve their skills in horticulture, conservation and traditional construction on the Hixberry Lane site. Each young person was offered four days of training in order to increase the breadth of their knowledge. One of the Project Co-ordinators, Steve Pike, took responsibility for setting up programmes of work and evaluating the success of the project by devising questionnaires and other feedback mechanisms.

The Project was advertised via local schools and colleges and through the Earthworks newsletter, posters and MENCAP publications. It was funded using grant monies provided by Hertfordshire County.

Friday Group (Radlett Lodge School)

Each Friday during term times various groups of autistic children from Radlett Lodge School have been attending site with teachers and support workers. Under the guidance of the Placement Student, Dave Crisp, the children have undertaken small scale projects such as: planting, weeding, making bird feeders and craft work. This has helped to improve their environmental awareness and abilities to work individually and as part of a team.

1.3 Volunteers

Our volunteers play a crucial role at Earthworks. They come from a variety of backgrounds and thus contribute various skills and ideas as a result. Although their reasons for becoming involved differ, all volunteers join in activities together and support each other in the best interests of the trainees.

Volunteers' decisions to join Earthworks are influenced by a number of stimuli including: referrals from St. Albans Council for Voluntary Services (CVS); self-referral; Earthworks promotional material (available on our website and at local events); discussion with Earthworks' trainees and staff and interest generated by the Earthworks stall at the Farmers Market.

In 2009-10 we welcomed some new volunteers including: Helen, Mandy, Simon and Sara and Dan.

A "Thank you" barbecue was held for all the volunteers on a gloriously sunny day in June 2009. This was a good opportunity for everyone to meet each other (since they all attend on different days throughout the week) and there was much conversation and laughter.

In spring 2009 a group of volunteers attended a Makaton training course to help them communicate more effectively with non-verbal trainees. Later in the year some of the volunteers requested first aid training and this was delivered via training courses run by the St Albans Centre for Voluntary Service (CVS). Two volunteer support workers also benefited from an "Introduction to Learning Disabilities" course.

1.4 Staff

Earthworks employed 9 members of staff of which 5 were full time and 4 were part time.

All members of staff brought a variety of skills and knowledge to the team relating to; social work, conservation, organic horticulture, construction skills, woodwork, graphic design, fundraising, book-keeping and administration. As well as these practical skills, the team has extensive experience of working with people who are disadvantaged in some way.

Staff who left Earthworks:

Emma Eynon	Acting Project Leader
Bianca Badham	Placement Student (University of Hertfordshire)
Carol Wright	Book-keeper

Staff who joined the Earthworks team:

Bianca Badham	513 Fund Children's Project Co-ordinator
David Crisp	Placement Student (University of Hertfordshire)
Teresa Gore	Director

Staff who remained in their roles:

Phil Maitland	Project Co-ordinator
Steve Pike	Project Co-ordinator
Sarah Massey	Horticultural Co-ordinator
Alex McCann	Fundraising Co-ordinator
Fiona Gulliver	Administrator

Staff training

All of the site staff also completed Makaton training to help them communicate more effectively with non-verbal trainees. The signing techniques they learnt have regularly been put into practice.

Steve Pike completed his chainsaw assessment at Oaklands College. This has proved beneficial in terms of processing waste wood into logs for sale.

Throughout the year Earthworks attended training courses provided by Hertfordshire County Council, local colleges and other external providers. In March 2010 the site staff and the Director were booked onto the City and Guilds "Introduction to Learning Disabilities" professional qualification. Completion of this qualification will help the staff to improve their existing skills and provide further reassurance to trainees, their families and advocates.

1.6 Management Committee

The Management Committee brings a wealth of experience to Earthworks from different backgrounds and professions. They provide guidance, advice and support to Earthworks.

The Project Group consists of all the regular site users (trainees and volunteers) and meets monthly. The Group discusses work, future plans and improvements at Earthworks and elects members to represent the group on the Management Committee. Richard Stubbs and Steve Lane were the representatives from the Project Group for 2009/10.

2.0 FINANCES AT EARTHWORKS

Local stakeholders often ask how Earthworks generates income and how such a small charity has stayed in business for 15 years. The following brief summary provides an overview answer.

2.1 Trainee Fees

Earthworks currently offers 44 placements (spaces available for trainees) over the 5 day week. Of these 44 placements, more than half are paid for by charging trainee fees.

These fees are paid by individuals, their families or their care providers, e.g. Scope, Walsingham.

In April 2009 trainee fees increased by 4.2% in accordance with percentage uplift sanctioned by Hertfordshire County Council. The fees for each individual are now:

Low Support Needs: £41.68 per day (2008/09: £40.00 per day)

Medium Support Needs: £52.10 per day (2008/09: £50.00 per day)

High Support Needs: £93.78 per day (2008/09: £90.00 per day)

Although Earthworks was loath to charge more for services, an increase was necessary to try and cover the escalating costs of operation, especially during a time of recession. The new rates remain very competitive when compared to fees charged by other comparable service providers.

2.2 Hertfordshire Partnership Agreement (Block Contract)

In 2009/10 between 17 and 19 of the trainee placements across the week that were not funded by direct trainee fees were funded under the Hertfordshire Partnership Agreement. The Agreement is a “block contract” that exists between Earthworks and Hertfordshire County Council (HCC).

Under the contract Earthworks provides horticultural and craft-based therapy and training to local people with learning disabilities and/or mental health problems for a flat rate monetary sum paid by HCC.

For the year 2009/2010, Earthworks received £38,338 for contract works under the Hertfordshire Partnership Agreement.

2.3 Main Income (Trainee Fees and Hertfordshire Partnership Agreement)

The vast majority of Earthworks' income takes the form of trainee fees and the monies received under the Partnership Agreement. In 2009/10 this combined income was just short of £91,000.

The annual cost of running Earthworks is over £150,000. For this reason the charity submits a number of bid applications for grants each year. We also work hard to supplement our income via the sale of produce and products and by undertaking various contract works. In addition we seek donations and sponsorship from local businesses, schools and philanthropic groups or request that they raise funds on our behalf. Finally we try to generate income from hiring out the site or disposing of assets.

2.4 Grants

The grant income for 2009/10 was £48,430. Earthworks acknowledges the generosity and support of the following grant providers:

Hertfordshire County Council (Children, Schools and Families)
Big Lottery Fund
Bailey Thomas Foundation
Co-op Community Fund

2.5 Donations and Fundraising

Donations and fundraising in 2009/10 totalled £26,578. We would like to thank all of the generous benefactors who supported us throughout the year.

2.6 Petty Cash

In order to reduce the number of staff expenses, the majority of site-related costs (e.g. refreshments, wood, small tools and seeds) are now paid for using a debit card. A specific account contains a small amount of money which is accessed as and when necessary.

2.7 Accounts for 2009/10

Please refer to the separate Treasurer's Report and Accounts.

3.0 ACTIVITIES ON SITE

3.1 Description of the site

The Earthworks site has a wealth of productive and beautiful areas as well tranquil spots. Our site contains large ornamental areas, an orchard, a cob building, a woodland and log storage area, compost bins and wildflower meadows. Allotments are used for vegetable growing as is the polytunnel and our market garden area.

The site is maintained in an environmentally sustainable manner. Earthworks is not connected to the national grid and rainwater is collected for irrigation purposes. Environmentally sustainable technologies for on-site power generation are visible around the site. All visitors use the compost toilets. Recycled materials are used to create or improve facilities in preference to buying new products.

3.2 DEVELOPMENTS ON SITE

Early in 2009, the trainees, volunteers and staff tidied the market garden. As part of this work a mulch-covered picnic area was created for the staff from the Countryside Management Service (CMS) whose property borders Earthworks. The site team also painted much of the fence that divides the Earthworks and market garden / CMS site.

Around the same time the Green Team of Groundwork Hertfordshire filled in a big hole near the back of the site hut which had been created when an old abandoned sink unit was removed. This small project improved safe access through and around this area as a new path was created.

The area around the new pond was planted with lots of natural and semi-natural plants which have matured well over the year.

The interior of the site hut was painted white and this has brightened it up considerably.

In June 2009 it was agreed that the site would benefit from the installation of: a new kitchen that would be robust and easy to clean, a new gas hob (to replace the camping stove) and a gas hot water system for hand washing and washing up.

During the autumn, when attempting to repair the chimney for the fire place in the shed, it was discovered that the stove had a large crack. It was decided that a brand new stove should be fitted as this was considered a more safe and efficient way of heating the shed and boiling the kettles. Chiswell Green Fireplaces agreed to supply and fit a stove and flue at a discounted rate in November 2009. This arrangement meant that the job was completed faster and we could be sure that the installation was undertaken professionally and safely. The new stove was located in the middle of the shed (it had formerly been part of the kitchen) between the two front windows so that more people were able to benefit from the heat. A robust fireguard and safety signs were erected by the site staff in accordance with the relevant risk assessment and health and safety policy.

The installation of the new stainless steel kitchen was completed to a very high standard just before Christmas. The trainees, volunteers and staff were very pleased with the end result. The flue and gas piping were due to be installed in the week beginning 4th January 2010 but installation was postponed due to inclement weather. The connections were made on 25th and 26th January 2010 so the site hut now benefits from both cooking gas and hot water from the new system.

In February 2010 the woodchopping area to the rear of the site was cleared of rubbish, much of which had to go into a skip. This area will be re-developed in 2010/11 to increase firewood sales and opportunities for woodcraft.

Fundraising continued throughout the year to enable the replacement of the existing compost toilets. Following a thorough research exercise, one suitable supplier was

identified. Earthworks staff agreed the specification of the new toilets and work should begin in 2010/11.

4.0 EARTHWORKS IN THE COMMUNITY

4.1 Farmers' Market

Earthworks has an established pitch at the monthly farmers' market in St Albans. We continued to sell our own organically grown fruit, vegetables and herbs as well as bird and bug boxes and other craft items. All produce and products sold well. Trainees and volunteers helped to run the stall and gained in experience and confidence.

In 2009/10 the Farmers' Market raised £2034.

4.2 Footpath Maintenance Contract for Hertfordshire County Council

Earthworks trainees and staff continued to maintain a number of footpaths and Rights of Way throughout St Albans on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council. The footpath maintenance work is excellent because it provides us with the flexibility to choose when it is best for site clearance, tidying and repairs to occur. This is a popular contract with the trainees because of the variety of location and activity.

This work represented an income of £11,830 during 2009/10.

4.3 Sales of Produce and Earthworks Products

Organically grown fruit, vegetables, herbs and plants as well as honey and craft items continue to be sold at various community events throughout St Albans and the wider area. Sales from these stalls remain a good source of revenue throughout the year. Most importantly, the trainees receive great satisfaction from organising and helping with the sales because all their hard work seems especially worthwhile. Even throughout the winter months log sawing and splitting remain a very popular activity with the trainees and bring in much needed revenue at a quiet time of year.

Over the past year Earthworks has also been supplying fresh vegetables to the Butterwick Day Centre, Kashu restaurant, Courtyard Café and Near, Far and Fair shop. The café and the shop have helped to promote our work by referring to the origin of the produce on boards and in window displays.

Site sales in 2009/10 totalled nearly £3000.

4.4 Garden Contract Work

During summer 2009 garden contract work was carried out on Thursdays and Fridays on an ad hoc basis. One of the projects was the design and construction of a new garden at the home of two of our trainees. The Project Co-ordinators worked with the trainees to establish what they wanted. Features of this project included: a

raised pond, vegetable beds and bird feeding stations. Elsewhere the Garden Contract teams cleared gardens of weeds and rubbish, mowed and strimmed lawns, pruned hedges and trees and fixed broken fences.

5.0 WORKING WITH OTHERS

5.1 Students from the University of Hertfordshire

Students from the Geography and Environmental Science and Nursing departments of the University worked alongside Earthworks' permanent staff and gained valuable experience.

David Crisp joined Earthworks in September 2009 as the Placement Student for 2009-10. David will complete a 48 week "sandwich" placement at Earthworks as part of his degree in Environmental Management. During this time he will help to expand existing activities for trainees and volunteers and devise new projects and initiatives. David's approach to his work will be informed by his studies for his degree. Under the supervision and guidance of an Earthworks assessor he must produce a Project Report relating to the work that he will have undertaken. This will be jointly evaluated by the University tutor and the Earthworks assessor.

Earthworks is a recognised placement for nursing students from the University's School of Nursing and Midwifery. The organisation provides 6 week placements throughout the year. In 2009-10 the placements were taken up by Franciesca and Laura, both of whom formed a strong rapport with the trainees and undertook all tasks professionally and with enthusiasm. The extra skills and ideas that student nurses bring to Earthworks are really valuable. They compliment those of the Earthworks staff and help influence our general approach as an organisation that provides day opportunities for people with disabilities.

5.2 Partnerships with local organisations

Earthworks has always felt it is important to form and maintain partnerships/close working relationships with other organisations. This year we have had the opportunity to work productively with and/or receive financial contributions from a number of local organisations including: Hertfordshire County Council Adult Care Services and Children, Schools and Families divisions; Butterwick Day Centre; St Albans and Harpenden Mencap; POhWER; Countryside Management Services; Highfield Park Trust; Council for Voluntary Services (CVS), University of Hertfordshire; Groundwork Hertfordshire; The National Autistic Society; Lafarge; Veolia Water; Price Waterhouse Cooper; Chiswell Fireplaces; RMC Aggregates Ltd, Emerald Landscape, Oakapple Landscapes, Robinsons Tree Surgeons and Wright Gardens. We would like to thank all of these groups and organisations for their help and support.

5.3 Visiting places off-site

In May 2009 a small group of trainees, volunteers and staff visited Heartwood Forest as part of an Access Consultation Day. The group was able to test how accessible the site was at that time for disabled users and to offer advice for future planning.

In June 2009 a group trainees and staff attended a Groundwork Hertfordshire Green Team celebration event at Trestle Arts Base. The Green Team had previously constructed a new section of footpath on site, close to the water butts.

5.4 Visitors to Earthworks

Earthworks is open Monday to Friday from 9.30am to 3.00 pm.

The staff encouraged visitors who wanted to discuss opportunities at Earthworks to attend the site for a guided tour and / or a separate “taster day”.

During this period, visitors to site included: potential trainees and volunteers; personnel from Hertfordshire County Council's Adult Care Services department; representatives of groups looking to set up similar projects to Earthworks; statutory organisations such as the local probation team and careers services; people with an interest in our work and customers.

Local organisations who used the site as a meeting/ function venue included the St. Albans cycle users group and Passport to Leisure. The latter held it's annual barbecue on the Earthworks site in July 2009.

5.5 Team building for Companies and Community Groups

Earthworks organises teambuilding days for companies keen to undertake works that underpin their commitment to corporate social responsibility.

On 24th June 2009 a group of accountants from Price Waterhouse Cooper came to site for a team building day organised and staffed by Groundwork Hertfordshire. The visitors created a new, wheelchair accessible path to the pond. They also re-vamped the potting shed by re-painting it and re-felting the roof and built a new base for the water-butts using railway sleepers.

On 18th March 2010 Groundwork Hertfordshire arranged for around 30 employees from Veolia Water's offices in Hatfield to work on the site. They helped Earthworks staff, trainees and volunteers to clear the woodworking area in preparation for re-development and repaired and repainted fences.

These types of initiative reinforce the belief that people of all abilities can work and grow alongside each other.

Teambuilding days are a great asset to Earthworks because they enable us to undertake large projects and activities and complete them to a much reduced timescale.

6.0 EVENTS

6.1 Earthworks Events

Elisabeth Day was held on 17th April 2009 to commemorate the life and achievements of Earthworks St Albans' founder, Elisabeth Hudson. The day was a great success and, under the guidance of two volunteers, Viv and Jenny, everyone enjoyed weaving a new willow fence around the pond. The group also planted snowdrops transplanted from Elisabeth's house into the Earthworks woodland. Following a big, shared lunch the group did some circle dances on the lawn. This event was also a wonderful opportunity for some of the trainees to receive their NPTC Skills for Life Certificates in Horticulture.

The Open Garden event was held on 31st May 2009 and raised £862.

The Summer Fair was held on Sunday 5th July 2009 and raised £2038. This event had much more the feel of a village fete than in previous years and included a number of children's games such as Splat-the-Rat and Horseshoe Hoopla. The raffle was particularly successful with prizes such as free entry to Willows Farm and a meal and a bottle of wine at a local pub.

The Harvest Fair was held on Sunday 6th September 2009 and raised £656.

These events provided the general public and all Earthworks participants with opportunities to celebrate the organisation and to remind everyone of our important role within the community. Trainees, volunteers, the Management Committee and staff welcomed huge numbers of visitors of all ages who enjoyed walks around the site and learnt more about our work; bought plants, food, books, bric-a-brac and refreshments and observed natural crafts by local craftsmen and artisans.

The annual Halloween party took place on Wednesday 28th October 2009 and also "doubled up" as a leaving party for Emma Eynon. It was a very enjoyable evening which ran from 3-5pm as opposed to the former 4-6pm to ensure that there was daylight for most of the party. The party was only advertised internally to restrict attendance to Earthworks members; this made the party much more manageable than in previous years. Emma had a good send off, receiving cards and gifts from the trainees. The bonfire that the staff and trainees constructed was made from scrap timber donated by a local building site.

The Christmas Party was held on Wednesday 16th December 2009 and was a great success; it was well attended by trainees and volunteers and everyone had a fantastic afternoon. The trainees had decorated the site hut and outside area to create a fun and festive atmosphere. As usual, the trainees and volunteers were issued with certificates of achievement for the past year as recognition and thanks for their contributions.

6.2 Wider Community Events

On Sunday 28th June 2009 Earthworks ran a stall at Larks in The Park at Fleetville Recreation ground. By selling plants and crafts and running a children's activity, £80 was raised.

A month later we made £170 selling plants, vegetables, crafts and honey at the Highfield Park Fete.

On Sunday 20th December 2009 we sold Christmas wreaths and decorations, bird boxes and produce at a local event in Tyttenhanger. This raised £176.

In addition to raising funds, attendance at these events helps to promote Earthworks St Albans around the city and staff and volunteers can answer questions about the history of the charity and the range of services and activities on offer.