



**PRESS RELEASE: September 2009**

## **Normandy Therapy Garden – a community success story**

A group of Gurkhas, staff and volunteers after a hard day's work at Normandy Therapy Garden



For over five years Normandy Therapy Garden Centre has been offering practical horticulture therapy to people who are disabled or who have learning difficulties, and has developed into a popular service in the local community.

Normandy Community Therapy Garden started as an idea back in 1998 when local resident Ann Adey saw the need in the community for a charity which addressed the needs of socially disadvantaged people. The charity launched in 2001, with an acre of derelict land donated by Guildford Borough Council.

There was a lot of work to make the site ready for use, but with the help of Lottery funding, an anonymous benefactor, two years of dedicated fundraising, and construction work by the British Association of Landscape Industries, the site was finally ready.

The garden was officially opened in 2003 by TV personality, Charlie Dimmock and the first clients were able to use the Centre. Its aim is to provide therapy to people of all ages through practical horticulture, helping to build self-confidence and providing individuals with new and enjoyable life skills.

The Centre has won four Gold awards in the 'Guildford in Bloom' competition for best community garden and two Mayor's awards for disability access. The garden is also proving to be an environmental asset for the local community, as it operates a

composting station funded by Surrey County Council where residents can take their green waste.

In 2004, it became a Centre for the delivery of vocational training in horticulture, able to award the National Proficiency Test Certificate (City and Guilds) in horticulture.

In 2007 the 'Green School' was set up to accept special needs students aged 14 to 18 from special needs schools in Surrey and Hampshire. The aim is to give them practical skills to enable them to pursue further education, training and potential employment. In May 2008 their work with young people was recognised by Merrist Wood Agricultural College.

The garden has continued to source funding to help add more facilities over the years. Having first contacted Surrey Community Action in October 2006, they have developed a relationship with the infrastructure charity and this has helped them to bid for funding from major grant-making trusts, including Awards-for-All and Grassroots Grants.

Bryan Starkey, Chair of the Trustees, said, "We are always seeking for ways to improve our services and to build on the excellent work that Ann Adey started. We are now looking to construct a permanent building on site to replace the current pre-fabricated unit. It's our largest project to date, and we've been very fortunate to receive the services of local architect, Liz Steer, who has offered her time and produced a more cost-effective building design. So far we've raised £20,000 of the £100,000 it will need to complete the project."

In the meantime, many local groups continue to benefit from the garden, including allotment groups, Women's Institutes, church groups, garden clubs and more recently a group of Gurkhas and their wives who have worked under the watchful eye of Rob Steer, the Centre's Horticulturist.

To find out more about the Therapy Garden, contact Alan Burchett, Trustee and Acting Centre Manager on 01483 813846.

For free impartial funding advice for your group, contact Pauline at Surrey Community Action (Tuesdays and Wednesdays) email: [paulines@surreyca.org.uk](mailto:paulines@surreyca.org.uk) or telephone 01483 459292 ext 215.

Surrey Community Action is a registered charity which works to strengthen and support the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) across Surrey through access to advice, training, funding and advocacy. Surrey Community Action actively encourages volunteering and the details of local volunteer centres in Surrey can be found on our website at: [www.surreyca.org.uk/vb.htm](http://www.surreyca.org.uk/vb.htm)