

### **Stephanie's Story – Creative Learning Volunteer**

I have previously worked with adults with learning difficulties, both as a teacher at a local FE college and most recently as a volunteer with Camphill Village Trust, supporting residents there to work in a co-production environment in a market garden. I have a particular interest in social and therapeutic gardening, and attended an introductory course run by the gardening charity, Thrive, a few years ago.

Having moved house, I was looking for a volunteering role similar to my previous one but closer to our new home. Creative Learning looked like a similar set up, though a little different. I was already aware of Walsingham Support when it was Salter's Hill, through students who attended college.

Although the groups are kept small, having a volunteer with a group helps to encourage all the group members to participate in whatever way they can and gain more from their participation. Supporting the people we support to work in the garden in particular has enormous benefits for their mental health and well-being.

The main challenge since I started volunteering with Walsingham Support has inevitably been Covid: the need for testing, the use of masks which inhibits some communication and the unavoidable need to close down at certain times when cases increased. Another challenge has been the weather but that's to be expected when working in a garden!

I guess it's the feeling of giving something back to society by doing something useful with one's time; the knowledge that I can use my experience to be of some use and help to others; it's a reason to get out and about, particularly after prolonged lockdowns; and the pleasure of getting to know the people we support on the courses. Working in the garden in particular gives everyone a greater sense of well-being.