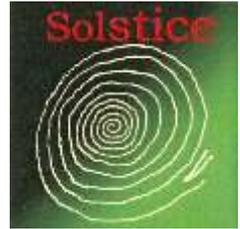


Solstice Nurseries

The timeline of a social firm that



Growing People and Plants

October 2005 - 2017

Sowing the Seeds

1997

Grampian Primary Care ran Unicorn Enterprises which was a training and assessment centre for people with severe and enduring mental health problems. The decision was taken to re-commission the service from the National Health Service to Social Work. This meant the closure of Unicorn Enterprises and its business activities, one of which was a gardening service. Whilst the other activities were relocated into funded projects, the Unicorn gardening team formed the Solstice steering Group and prepared itself to become a Social Firm.



1998

While waiting for things to move forward the gardeners decided to go to college to study horticulture and related SVQ's.

2000

Solstice was established as an aspiring Social Firm with the high degree of participant involvement recognised. In addition to garden maintenance, the aim was to develop a wholesale nursery growing hardy Scottish heathers to ensure viability and all year round activity.



Social Firms Scotland
Supporting businesses to transform lives

2001

The business plan was drawn up.

2002

A search began for an approved provider with which to establish a partnership. The search for a new site continued as the original organisation withdrew its offer. Gardening work started for commercial firms and private work was sought.

2003

Following a search of the local area, an excellent site was found at Banchory and Leggart Estates.

6 participants completed their VQ modules and were awarded a VQ in Amenity Horticulture Level 2.

When the search for an approved provider to run Solstice was unsuccessful, we were notified that there would be no funding. Unicorn closed its doors to all service users on 24th December.

Germination

2004

Enthusiasm to become a social firm remained with the participants despite the fact that there was no funding available.

At this time Grampian Housing Association were looking for an in-house maintenance team, and when they heard of the plight of the Solstice participants, they offered premises and funding advice. Planning permission was obtained for the nursery site.

Social Firms Scotland showcased Solstice Nurseries at their Annual Conference.



2005

Successful grant applications to Communities Scotland and Social Firms Scotland resulted in funding to develop the wholesale nursery.

In March, development of the bare field site began.



Growth October 2005

In October, Solstice Nurseries was officially opened by HRH The Princess Royal, Patron of the College of Occupational Therapists.



2006

Solstice in partnership with Aberdeen College began a VQ in Amenity Horticulture Level 2 on site with new participants. Certificate courses such as Health and Safety, Manual Handling and

First Aid began to be offered to all new participants.

Solstice tendered for and procured the contract from Grampian Housing Association to maintain sites around Aberdeen for 3 years, with the possibility of extending it to 5 years if we were in partnership.



2007

Propagation of our hardy Scottish Heathers began.

We further developed the site and created a standing out area for the more mature heathers.

Friends of Royal Cornhill kindly donated money to purchase a polytunnel for the use of participants. The 'small holding' as it became known provided a place for the participants to further their horticultural knowledge on their own projects and grow fruit and vegetables for healthy living. Some of our early plants were showcased at Aberdeen Blooms and eight new participants completed their VQ Amenity Horticulture Level 2.



In a meeting of board members, staff and participants we developed our motto:

Growing People and Plants



2008

An exciting year as Solstice launches the sale of its hardy Scottish heathers at Aberdeen Blooms. Blue Peter gardener Chris Collins visited the stand and endorsed the work that Solstice does:

"To many gardening is a private hobby...To me it has far more reaching importance. It aids our mental health; it beautifies town centres and brings us together as people. The work Solstice undertakes is a demonstration of the importance of horticulture to human beings."

2009

This was the most difficult year for Solstice. With no regular income to support our activities, staff and participants made unbelievable personal sacrifices to keep Solstice Nurseries open. Small signs of support – a BBC TV news article and involvement in the Sports Relief challenge - gave everyone the heart to battle through this time.

The heathers meantime bloomed in the standing-out field with irrigation to help them through the season.



2010

Our maintenance team undertook a major face-lift for patient gardens at Cornhill Hospital and we started to undertake work for Aberdeen Property Leasing. We continued our work at a modest level with support from NHS Grampian.

We had marketing support to increase our sales of plants and widened our range to include herbaceous plants, alpines and shrubs. We featured in a TV broadcast of "Up a Long Creek" as one of the projects assisted by Sports Relief.

Participants valued the training they had:

'I've just been looking forward to coming here every day. I've learned so much and I really enjoy working with the plants.'

2011

We were very grateful for funding received to purchase a new truck for garden maintenance. New marketing strategies were implemented, with 6-packs for heathers, herbaceous and alpine plants, and we had outlets in various local retail businesses.



There were various changes in staff and volunteer roles as we welcomed a new board director, Jackie Berry retired as Chairman and Susan Kirkwood took on the role at the AGM in October.

2012



In May, we held our first Open Day, welcoming neighbours and friends in the local area to visit the site, buy plants and enjoy refreshments supplied by the local church Guild. With a sunny day, everyone had a lovely time, including all the participants who volunteered to run various stalls during the day.

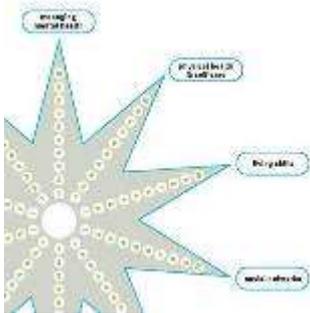
"I was flabbergasted when I drove through the gates and saw folk queuing early to get in—what a lovely surprise!" (participant at Solstice.)

The maintenance team struggled in the cold, wet summer but the spirit was strong as one participant put it: *"it's never the same two days running so you don't get bored, and it's great when customers come out to speak and give us feedback"*.

For several years participants made wreaths for sale at Christmas. This year we had even more successful sales events at Cornhill Hospital, and other venues including local churches.

2013

The year started with two difficult personnel-related issues to be resolved and we very much appreciated the support of our solicitors, the FSB and a specialist HR barrister to help us work our way through them.



Our focus then turned to submitting a major tender to provide our service for Aberdeen City Council (ACC) Social Work.

We piloted the use of a “Recovery Star” process to assist with tracking participants’ progress. In the autumn we were awarded the contract with ACC Social Work and started to work more closely with them.

2014

In February there was a successful “target” meeting with participants to assess how well we were doing as a service, and where things



needed to change. One follow up was with First Bus senior staff where we successfully resolved issues relating to concession cards.

Through the year with new participants and funding, the contract with ACC went well and we created several opportunities to promote our services through visits and leaflets.

We also congratulated several participants on their successful achievement in gaining a Level 2 SVQ qualification in horticulture.



Following a successful agreement with TAQA last year, we were very grateful to have the funds to fix our leaking roof, and we started our search for a second vehicle to support the maintenance and nursery activities

In the autumn we established our presence on Facebook and, through Adopt an Intern, we started to develop our new web site – one responsive to mobiles and tablets.

2015

The first few months brought the launch of our new web site and a new van – preparing us well for the summer season.

With increasing participants, more orders from landscape companies, and continuing garden maintenance work, we had a busy summer.



We also enjoyed two Open Days – in May and then on a wet July day. Both were well supported and involved the participants in running the various stalls and talking to customers about the plants.



As we celebrated 10 years of Solstice Nurseries, we were very grateful to all those – too numerous to mention individually – who helped us on our journey; staff, participants, volunteers, neighbours, customers and suppliers, public and third sector organisations, supporters – individuals and companies and anyone that is not covered in any of these groups! Thank you all....

2016

At the end of last year we held our first Christmas Fair to sell wreaths and decorations; we included some of our friends and neighbours to join us with the ladies from the Guild providing refreshments. The day was successful and encouraged us to hold this annually.

The 2016 Winter training programme was very busy with participants encouraged to undertake a number of certificated courses to improve their chances of employment.

In October, filming took place on site with Jim McColl from the Beechgrove garden. Participants enjoyed meeting the 'TV' gardener and chatting to him.



2017

Participants undertaking their VQ continue to enjoy the training and are settling into assessments. We had an excellent report from the external verifier who particularly likes the fact that we combine our training within a real commercial setting.

Social events this year included: our first Burns Lunch with music and poetry, Occupational Therapists facilitated Mindfulness sessions which participants found extremely beneficial and in summer we had a barbecue lunch followed by a most interesting talk from Brian Stewart about the local moth population.

Participant numbers now reach 25. This number of people combined with increasing commercial orders for the nursery has resulted in discussions around expansion of space to hold stock and train participants over a longer period of the year. Therefore, plans have started to gain funding assistance for a shed as storage and workspace; we are hoping these will move forward in 2018.

2018

This year has been very busy with both Beannachar and The Beechgrove Garden celebrating 40th Anniversaries, we have provided both places with plants and trees for new area and existing area revamps. It was an pleasure to be associated with both projects.

This year has also seen a change in circumstances at Solstice. With the nursery getting ever busier, we have made the decision to close the maintenance side of the business, this has freed up the Participants that were being taken off site for long periods of time especially during the summer months.

This year also saw Solstice going through a very hard and sad time for us all with the loss of our very dear friend, colleague and board member Victoria McCann.

Victoria came to us during the early days of Solstice and has been with us ever since, never wanting to leave the calm surroundings that abound here.

Victoria was previously a lecturer at Aberdeen University using her English Lit degree while teaching a Breakthrough Course and Women's Studies.

In 2015 Victoria progressed further at Solstice and became CPD Manager, taking on the roll of participant development and working with the appropriate support providers for each individual.



As well as being a fantastic wife and mother to Stephen and Miranda, she was also a loving pet owner, taking great pride in her Collies and latterly her six Chihuahuas as well as her cats.

A memorial celebration of Victoria was held at Solstice on the 20th of July, with over sixty people in attendance.

Victoria is greatly missed by all at Solstice and we will remember her fondly.

2019

The Participants started working with Albertino Costa on a course on sculpting rocks. They were learning how to work with new and very different tools and to visualise how the stone could be worked to create an amazing piece of sculpted art. They were working on 2 different stones, one was full of inclusions and large chunks continually came off, the other much harder granite was really starting to take shape.



Ruarri hard at work sculpting the chin of the face

Solstice said goodbye to Joanne & Dianne this year and hello to Karen and Jenny in the office, Karen in Administration and Jenny in Accounts.

This is also the year that Covid hit. We closed in March after getting all the Participants settled and organised first. Jackie and George kept the nursery running with the help of Richie and Bruce and a few volunteers. Jenny and Karen were able to work from home, Jenny with the accounts and Karen keeping in touch with the participants on the phone and ensuring that they were safe and well. We reopened in August to much delight from all.

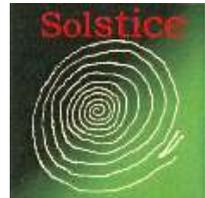
By the end of the year after all our Christmas fairs we were just finishing getting cleared up and then we were closed again for more Covid shutdown. This was worse than the first as this was winter, colder, darker and longer days for the Participants.

Roll on 2020.

The staff team: Business Manager: George Parkinson, Nursery Manager: Jackie Bibby; CPD Manager: Victoria McCann; Maintenance Co-ordinator Richard Slapp; Administration Co-ordinator: Joanne Brown; Book-keeper: Dianne Brown.

The Solstice Board: George Parkinson, Jackie Berry (chairman to 2011), Susan Kirkwood (Chairman from 2011), Victoria McCann, Alan Gall, Brian Sherret, Serena Arif, Janice Nicol, Jackie Reynard, Richard Ward

12 years of Solstice Nurseries



Growing People and Plants

October 2005 – 2017

www.solsticenurseries.co.uk

