

Grow your own future

From wanting to be a mechanic, Alex is now determined to be a conservationist or gardener...

... and from the hard work he's put into the garden at Hendra Lodge and the course he's about to start at the Duchy College in conservation, he's well on his way to achieving his goals. Hendra could be mistaken for a Foyer - much of the same things apply; it is for young people 16-25 who find themselves homeless, unable to cope on their own or vulnerable in some other way. The staff work hard on empowering the residents to take up work or volunteering opportunities, and they help with benefit advice, life skills (such as cookery and budgeting), signposting courses and training, and everything in between. All of which helps the residents move towards successful independent living at the end of their stay at Hendra.



The Lodge is bright and welcoming to visitors and its eight residents. It's a quiet area, surrounded by countryside just outside of Liskeard. Originally the garden couldn't even be called such. Three summers ago it was an area filled with concrete and a bench. The idea of home grown veggies was the brainchild of support officer Lesley Caddel and Alex was one of the first residents to volunteer his time and his already impressive range of practical skills, "I wanted the garden to look nice. It was something to do and I really like the idea of growing veg". Thanks to generous donations from Lesley's neighbours, the residents suddenly had seeds and tools to get started. The DCH grants and award programme was able to supply a small amount of funding also.



No one is obliged to work in the garden, yet they always manage to get volunteers and then one or two like Alex who are willing to dedicate much more time to the business of growing their own. They've grown beans, tomatoes, lettuce, potatoes, corn, onions, carrots, leeks, cabbages, peas - the list goes on. But Alex isn't just green-fingered; he's also learning new ways of storing and preparing the different crops so that out of season, they still have vegetables to use in cooking.

This year's project was a raised bed, increasing their growing area and providing better drainage, which can benefit certain crops like carrots and parsnips. Next year's project is already being planned out and costed; a wooden seating area with shelter, so that people can make more use of the garden whatever the weather, and encourage smokers to go into the garden and not stand at the front of the building. Alex, perhaps unsurprisingly, is involved in this project, too.

And that's the benefit of the garden and subsequent projects that arise; it not only gives the residents an opportunity to develop skills and even acquire new ones, it's a way also of staff and residents connecting. If residents become involved in planning, decision making and working, they are much more likely to become engaged with other things that are happening at Hendra - and there always seems to be something happening at Hendra! Lesley says, "Some of our residents have had a really tough time of it, so to see them having fun and coming out of their shells is fantastic. That's why I like working with young people, there's always hope."

The residents have also done a lot of decorating and there is an active tenants association at Hendra. The path to secure and independent living isn't always easy, especially for vulnerable young adults, but for the residents at Hendra at least, there is the opportunity to learn, have fun and maybe even start on a career path that they never even thought was possible