

Case study: Changing lives through volunteering

Fair Train and Cultivate London

Liam joined Cultivate London as a volunteer in the spring of 2011, age 20. The social enterprise trains unemployed young people in landscaping and horticulture, helping to progress them into further training or employment. Prior to volunteering, Liam had been unemployed for six months, having previously worked in security and plumbing.

Liam suffers from depression and Emotional Personality Disorder; something which greatly affects his ability to hold down a job. He had been having significant problems with this leading up to the time he joined Cultivate London. Furthermore, he was very overweight and has type 2 diabetes, which he was having trouble managing at the time.

However, things started to improve once he began volunteering. Liam found he really enjoyed the work, and was hired as an apprentice later that year when a position came available. During this time, Liam went under some amazing changes:

- He lost 4 stone in the first 6 months of volunteering, and his weight has remained stable since. Overall, he is now 5 stone lighter than he was when he joined Cultivate London in 2011.
- His diabetes is under control thanks to the weight he has lost, and to the generally active nature of the job. He now requires much less medication.
- His mental health, although still a struggle, is much more stable.

It has not been a smooth ride – twice in the past four years Liam has suffered serious mental health difficulties, and had to be signed off work for extended periods of time. However, Cultivate London supported him through these periods, and he has been well for many months now.

Overall, Liam says he is much happier and more mentally stable than he ever was before he started volunteering. He says that a large part of this is a) he finds being with the plants very therapeutic, b) being busy all the time keeps his mind occupied, and c) he interacts with a lot of other people who have faced similar problems.



“Cultivate London did not just help with my physical and mental health; it also improved my confidence and social life. I learnt I was not the only person with these issues”

Despite the challenges he has faced, Liam persevered, and with the support of the Cultivate London, succeeded in completing both a Level 2 and Level 3 apprenticeship. In recognition of this, he was named the Ealing Apprentice Network “Apprentice of the Year” in 2014.

Liam has since left Cultivate London to start his own landscape gardening business, which is now doing very well.

“Yes it has been challenging - probably more challenging for someone like me than someone that does not have to face the issues I have. But with the support from the Cultivate London team as well as keeping myself busy with a job that I enjoy, I have been able to overcome the darkest times of my life”

Adrienne Attorp, CEO of Cultivate London added: *“We are very proud of how far Liam has come since he joined us. He worked very hard to get where he now is, and we were happy to be able to support him along the way. Horticulture is a fantastic, hands-on way of engaging young people, and Liam's story is testament to this.”*

Cultivate London

A London-based urban farm and social enterprise which uses formerly derelict land to produce a range of local, organic, edible and ornamental plants, engaging learners in a sector they may not have previously considered. As well as learning new skills and working towards horticulture qualifications, learners get help with CV writing and interview techniques, and are often able to progress to opportunities within the organisation or onto further training or employment elsewhere, including within Cultivate London’s supply chain and customer base. Cultivate London is accredited with the Work Experience Quality Standard at silver level.

Fair Train

A national charity which champions the benefits of all types of work experience, including volunteering and apprenticeships. Fair Train is the Group Training Association for the voluntary and community sector and supports charities across the country to improve their volunteering provision and workforce development, through the national [Work Experience Quality Standard](#) accreditation.

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