

MEET ONITHA

LLOYD PARK VOLUNTEERING TEAM

How I joined The Lloyd Park Volunteer Gardening project

"I didn't even think I liked gardening that much! But the more you do it and the more you learn about the plants, the more interesting it gets. And when you actually plant something yourself and see it growing: that's the best time. When you think; Oh yeah! I've made that - I've helped that grow myself. That's what makes me do it."

My name is Onitha and I joined just after lockdown. I needed to use my brain a little bit. I'd been looking after my mum for ages and I just found that I was getting more and more isolated. You kind of lose a bit of yourself in a way... So, I knew I had to do something, and I thought any other course would be really boring! I did art and I enjoyed that, but I thought...

"What is really physical but creative at the same time? And it was the gardening. Once I got into it, I've not looked back at all."

I heard about The Lloyd Park Volunteer Gardening project through the gardening course that I was doing in 2019. I only did a few weeks because I ended up catching COVID. Then all the classes closed down anyway and I was really, really annoyed; but what can you do? You just have to go with it.... So, I put my name down for the Lloyd Park Volunteer Gardening project. A few of us did that - and we were called up! There were still COVID restrictions then, but they managed to work it out so we all had a turn.

And then I just carried on gardening... I'm a carer full time, so it just gets me out of the house for a few hours: it's just nice to be outside, whatever the weather. With good company! I learn something, it keeps me fit and I enjoy it. I learned a lot actually, from my own garden!

Skills I Have Learned

I still use those skills. I know how to identify trees. It's also helped me notice animals more, especially the really tiny ones like insects and butterflies... I was a sort of person who'd hack everything down in the autumn, but now I've learned that's probably when they need to go a little bit wild so the animals can live off them. Opened my eyes. Definitely. I've learned a lot.

I love pruning, especially the roses; it's just trying to get your eye in and look at the shape of something. And getting it right for a change! I think it looks great afterwards...

"And it's quite mindful... So, when I'm digging, pruning, planting, I can just kind of forget things and carry on with what I'm doing. Other things kind of leave my mind so I don't have to worry too much about it."

Support from Groundwork

It does give you a lot of structure. We learn about the tools, how you have to look after them, sharpen them, maintain them. And that I can take that back home as well: with my own tools. And we have a routine tea break!

I only come once a fortnight because I've got commitments at home, but it's a regular thing; something that I look forward to. Joining like-minded people.

If I Could Sum-Up my Experience in 3 Words

Creative, mindful and physical.

