



ROOT & BRANCH

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Looking Back as well as Forward

As we sadly say goodbye to Liz Clarke and thank her for all she has achieved for Root & Branch it seems a good moment to look back as well as forward. We need our memories to know who we are and I think we need to remember our history for the same reason. Only one person, Yvonne Castellano, has been working with the board since the beginning so I asked all of the original Trustees if they would like to record their memories of the early days of setting up Root & Branch. Most of them have done so and we will make the full text of what they sent available so people can read them if they are interested.

Root & Branch began as a dilapidated cartshed, a corner of a field and a dream of offering an opportunity for people in need to be on the land. The question was who in particular could benefit. On the 19th September 2000 we called a meeting of neighbours and interested individuals from the surrounding community. 24 people attended and from this 9 people formed a group which decided that there was a need for a project for people dealing with mental health issues. For four years we met and planned and wrote letters and finally succeeded in getting a grant enabling us to appoint Liz Clarke as manager and Patsy Dyer as her assistant.

What emerges from everyone's contributions is the excitement of working together to make something happen, a sense of shared vision – the belief in the therapeutic value of being in touch with the land in a supportive environment and the sheer hard work. Some recall the importance of making Root & Branch a refuge, a place for activity and convalescence rather than somewhere for training for work. Others stress the broadening out from a simple horticultural base to include other activities. Some emphasise the contribution of Liz Clarke to making it all actually happen. Everyone was committed to convincing key stakeholders that Root & Branch was answering a clear need in the community and could do it with skill and flair. There is no doubt this has proved true thanks to the continuing work of workers, volunteers, gardeners and trustees. We were the roots. Here's to the unfolding of many new branches! Liz Rothschild (founder trustee)

A Safe Place to Be

I have been attending Root & Branch since October as I have been suffering with depression. It really is a safe and friendly place to be. I have met some lovely people here. I particularly enjoy helping in the kitchen with the cooking, working in the forge, going for walks across the fields and making furniture polish and candles from the beeswax. I also found the wellness and recovery programme really useful. People have time to talk to you here and there is a lot of support and encouragement. At a very low point in my life, coming to Root & Branch has helped to get me back on track and I am now making plans to return to work. Katherine

Welcome Faith Mitchell

Hello Everyone - my name's Faith Mitchell and I'm joining Root & Branch in March, taking over from Liz as Manager, and I'm really looking forward to meeting everyone and finding out how things work.

I'm originally from Manchester but have lived in London too, and in Norway, and have been in Faringdon since 1995. I've worked before in teaching and tourism, and since 2000 I've managed a small local charity supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Swindon. I've done a lot of travelling, for work and pleasure, enjoy books, crafts and spending time with friends, and for the past 2 years I've had an allotment where I've been outdoors in all weather, digging, clearing weeds, growing fruit, vegetables & flowers and sometimes just sitting back, admiring the view and watching the world go by. I love it all and always feel good afterwards, however I feel when I start, so I'm sure I'll enjoy working at Root & Branch and hope I can help it continue to thrive. See you in March, Faith.



Faith in the R&B Office

Dave Butterworth—our new Secretary

My background is in chemical engineering research and software development so Root & Branch is something very different for me. I am therefore finding it a challenge get to grips with everything but it is also a lot of fun. I am very pleased to have been elected Honorary Secretary of Root & Branch. I still do a small amount of engineering work but do have the time to devote to other things and hope to spend more time with Root & Branch. I have some experience of charitable work having been a trustee of a national charity, The Herb Society, for three years. My hobbies include landscape painting, cooking and growing herbs (to cook with).

Intel Business Challenge

IT SMO braved the October weather and took part in one of Root & Branch's 'Challenge Days.' Root & Branch is a therapeutic gardening and rural craft project for people who experience mental health difficulties.

The day was a great opportunity to develop our team working abilities, learn new skills and help a commendable charity. When we first arrived we were greeted with mugs of tea to get us ready for our long day (it was no Java but it hit the spot!!)

We decided to tackle the challenge by splitting into three groups. Group one had a huge physical challenge of path laying, which included mixing cement (a huge amount may I add) by hand, (we were oh so relieved when the cement mixer arrived later on in the day) laying slabs and levelling the ground to produce an outstanding path!

Group two had a mentally challenging activity of producing wood storage containers from scrap. This did tax the ingenuity of the team (both intellectually and skills wise) however, as analysts they attacked this challenge, collecting the requirements and creating a sturdy finished product.

Group three (all women) showed their strength and endurance by digging a path for the rest of the slabs to be laid and then moving a large amount of boulders to a different location – all women had definitely eaten their spinach that morning!!!

At the end of the day the team declined the offer of a final cup of tea in favour of a well deserved pint which was seriously enjoyed. A huge thank you to Intel Involved for the financial support (and t-shirts), to Liz who runs Root & Branch and to Dave for his technical support and encouragement. A great day was had by all! Harriet Pleasance



Chris Park demonstrates how to take a print from a woodcarving



Kim in the craft room



The Garden this Spring

We began the first seed sowing in early February, with sweet peas (some we saved from our crop last year) in pots in the polytunnel, and with tomato, chilli and pepper seeds sown in modules in the warmth of the office windowsill – they need a long growing season!

On dry days, we'll start preparing the vegetable beds – digging in any green manure, and adding lots of home-made compost, ready for the Spring rush of planting. By May, most veg and annual flowers that have been started off in the polytunnel will have been planted out – the cosmos, cornflowers, zinnias, sunflowers and asters will keep us in colour until October.

Ideas for the coming season include creating: a new bed for shade loving perennial plants (in front of the main building); an asparagus bed; tunnels of hazel arches spanning the paths between the raised vegetable beds, to make the picking of the crops such as beans and gourds more accessible, inviting and fun! Cathy (Garden Supervi-

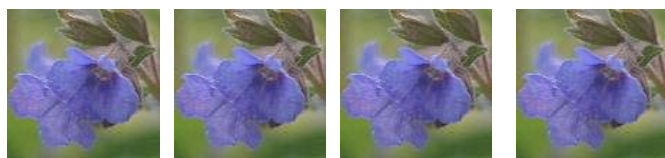
Back on Track

I have been coming to Root & Branch for nearly a year now for one day a week. I have tried working in the forge, gardening, pottery and have done the four week woodcarving course with Chris which I have particularly enjoyed. Root & Branch gives me the chance to get out into the country, see some new faces and do things which I haven't tried since school. I am now starting to get my life back on track and am feeling more optimistic about the future. Nick Scarfe

I can be who I am

I have been a gardener at Root & Branch for about nine months now. I am so grateful that the mental health care professionals supporting me suggested Root & Branch because it has been exactly the environment I need to recover from a long period of poor mental health. There are many ingredients that make it a therapeutic place to be, with so many options to express my creativity, which is essential to my sense of well-being. There is nothing more grounding than planting seeds and watching them grow and nurturing them until they blossom into either vegetables or flowers. This is how Root & Branch works; planting new seeds in the people that use it, instilling a sense of purpose and belonging, nurturing the potential in everyone at many different levels. I see it as a place where all who are involved can learn and develop including volunteers and staff as well as gardeners.

I believe that we can all learn from each other no matter who we are or what our circumstances or background is. The most important thing for me is that I can be who I am at Root & Branch with all of my strengths and weaknesses, being valued for my qualities rather than my dress sense or material success. In Root & Branch I have found a sanctuary of simplicity, peace and friendship, a reason to get up in the morning and having a sense of achievement and optimism when I go to bed at night. Kim Williams



Farewell from Liz Clarke

Five years ago I was extremely fortunate to have been selected to take the position of manager at Root & Branch. I was very excited and felt hugely privileged. Since then I have thoroughly enjoyed my dream job. I have met lots of interesting and inspiring people and have learnt so much, from welding to pruning fruit trees to strategic reviews and fundraising.

I will miss all the people I have met at Root & Branch enormously. I am indebted to many people for their kindness, support, faith and humour, and I'd like to say a big THANK YOU to everyone I have worked with over the past five years including colleagues, volunteers and clients.

I have decided to take on a new challenge—a Management Degree at Warwick University! I intend to stay in Oxford so I'm sure I'll bump into you in the future. Finally, I'd like to wish the new manager an enjoyable time in her new post and wish Root & Branch continuing success in the future.

SPRING EDITION



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- Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust
- Oxfordshire County Council
- Woodward Charitable Trust
- Awards for All
- Vale of White Horse District Council
- Swan Mountain Trust
-and many smaller but equally valued donors (see below)



Become a Volunteer with Root & Branch

Are you looking to do something interesting, challenging and rewarding ?

Then become a Volunteer for Root & Branch!
We can offer you the chance to get involved in administration, fundraising, gardening, crafts, as a trustee etc. with a friendly and supportive organisation.

Call **01793 780380** or look at our website www.rootandbranch.info for more information!

Future Plans and Events:

Yoga classes throughout March
Stalls at Faringdon and Wantage Farmer's Markets
Wood turning workshops in April
New wood working projects in our new workshop
Espalier tree sculpture made from metal
Pottery every Wednesday
Bee keeping every day
We have a new Wormery—learn how to look after a wormery
Creative Writing workshops with Kim
Make and Install a New Kitchen
Wellness Recovery Action Plan meetings every month
Music workshops in the summer



Dry Felting Workshop