

Solstice Interview With Victoria, Andrew, Stuart & Willy July 2007

Solstice Nurseries is a wholesale grower, nursery and garden/site maintenance service based in Aberdeenshire. Solstice Nurseries exists to provide work experience and training in horticultural nursery and garden maintenance work for people who have experienced mental health problems and who have a desire to return to or gain open paid employment.

Clare Neville, of Social Firms UK interviewed several employees of Solstice at the Social Firms UK Conference in July 2007. Here follows a transcript of their conversation.

For more information about Solstice Nurseries:
Visit www.solsticenurseries.co.uk
Tel: 01224 865907
Email: office@solsticenurseries.co.uk

Clare: How do you feel about working at Solstice?

Andrew: I enjoy it because I'm treated as a person and everybody else helps me if I need help, and it's good, brilliant fun.

Stuart: I've worked for Solstice for a number of years, since it very started. I'm one of the maintenance squad. I really do enjoy it, it gets me out of the house in the morning and gives me something to do. I'm learning different skills. I love meeting new people and training folk on machinery. It's just a brilliant job. You can't get a better job.

Willy: I've been working for Solstice for a year. I'm sitting my SVQ in horticulture and landscaping. It's really good; it gives me qualifications and something to do. I'm being rehabilitated from an illness, and in the future can hopefully get a better job with more money than I've had in past jobs.

Clare: I understand that the Manager is very important to the success of a Social Firm. Can you tell me anything about your Social Firm managers?

Andrew: All the Social Firm managers are brilliant. They work alongside us. They're full of information, plus, if I ask them to take off their jackets and get their hands dirty they'll do it. They help you to get forward. They're fun. Over the years that I've been here, I've never seen anything like it.

Clare: What sort of work do you do?

Willy: A typical day would be us guys here out on the sites every day, maintaining people's gardens. Mostly the job involves a combination of hoeing, strimming, cutting grass with lawnmowers; sometimes, now and again, digging over, sometimes raking, depending on what kind of garden we're working in. A typical day for the other guys in the squad is to be in the poly-tunnels propagating plants.

Victoria: I think working at Solstice is good because it opens up new opportunities, but it's also flexible enough to allow you to use skills that you might have developed in the past. It's a stepping stone towards employment and as far as that goes, it works very well. A company recently came to Solstice for a Team building day.

Stuart: They loved it didn't they, it was just brilliant.

Victoria: That was good as well and I think we could do more of that. I think it could be a good way of making a bit more money, but also, besides the money side of it there was the social side of it. It builds someone's confidence to realise that they are having to tell maybe a Manager what to do because that person hasn't a clue.

Clare: What's special about the type work you do?

Victoria: The work we do helps people who've had mental health issues in the past because our motto is, 'growing plants, growing people' and I think that really sums up Solstice.

Andrew: It's also watching something that grows that you have cut. It feels as if your knowledge is growing along with that plant as well. I used to think that I was putting the cuttings upside down, but three weeks later we lifted them up and saw the roots so they had been planted. It's like having a baby that grows. You can't beat it, it's really brilliant.

Willy: People talk about thankless jobs, but the thank you in this job is seeing your work. You can see the big change you've made afterwards. When you work in a garden which, is like a tip, and after it you notice how clean it is and how perfect it looks, it's total goodness in itself.