

## Creating career progression opportunities at The Crafty Gardener

The Crafty Gardener is a Community Interest Company based in Wolverhampton. The organisation provides adult social care day services, therapeutic activities, and education and employment-related support through social enterprise.

Directors Tilly McDermott and Sally Hilton both have extensive experience in social care and are committed to changing and challenging perceptions of adults with learning disabilities and/or autism. Their approach is deeply person-centred for the 60 people who draw on care and support from the organisation. By offering activities including gardening, music, crafts, and drama, they provide opportunities to build confidence, improve wellbeing, and develop new skills and networks.

The Crafty Gardener has an established reputation as a supportive employer. This commitment is reflected in rates of pay, meaningful training and development opportunities, and a 100% staff retention rate over the last three years across a team of around 20 care professionals.

As soon as The Crafty Gardener became aware of the Care Workforce Pathway, they began benchmarking their service using [ASC-WDS](#). This has helped demonstrate the impact of their work to local authorities and adult social care commissioners. With a culture of positive change already in place, they joined the Skills for Care Pathway adoption support programme to align their existing approach with the Pathway and to highlight some of the unique challenges faced by non-CQC registered services.

The directors set up a monthly working group to help drive the process forward. They are using the Pathway to review and map roles, identify training needs, and access relevant learning and development opportunities and associated funding. While their roles don't neatly fit existing Pathway role categories, they were able to explore the development of new roles, such as activity coordinator.

Tilly says: "The Pathway helps us show our worth in the sector and gives us a voice in shaping the future of social care."

The directors faced a challenge in getting buy-in from colleagues, who questioned the relevance of the Pathway for a non-regulated service. To address this, the team worked through the Pathway together, demonstrating the importance of services like The Crafty Gardener within the sector. Once staff understood the potential for recognition, consistency, and parity across the sector, the whole organisation committed to the work needed to implement the Pathway.

Sally says: “The Care Workforce Pathway has given us a recognised means of developing our staff structure and enabled conversations about how care services could look going forward, and how The Crafty Gardener could ‘fit’ into this.”

The organisation is starting to align their supervision and appraisal processes to reflect new and emerging roles. They have changed their organisational structure so it offers more opportunities for staff who are new to the care sector, as well as progression for existing staff members, should they want it. Conversations about training and development are taking place. Care workers are developing areas of expertise to support them in their role and looking at a range of other learning opportunities.

By benchmarking workforce data using ASC-WDS, The Crafty Gardener is able to provide valuable insight to commissioners and funders and can also compare their own data against other services, nationally and locally. This has helped them highlight the sustainability of their service to various stakeholders. They can evidence their high levels of staff retention, low staff sickness, higher than average levels of qualifications, and better than care sector average pay.

Staff say they appreciate having genuine opportunities to explore progression while feeling equally valued for remaining in frontline roles. Involving the workforce has strengthened engagement, as seen by the strong uptake of training since starting the Pathway adoption process.

Sally: “The process of adopting the Pathway has given us the structure, clarity and focus we needed to move forward with plans for our service.”

The Crafty Gardener intends to complete full Pathway adoption by the end of the year, embedding it throughout all core documents, policies, and processes.

Their advice to other care providers is simple: ensure there is buy-in from across the team before starting.

Sally explains: “It’s important to understand the Pathway and it’s benefits so you can share the reasons for doing it and bring everyone on the journey with you.”

Tilly adds: “I can’t see why any organisation wouldn’t want to use the Pathway, I can’t find any reason! If you aren’t doing some of the things already, then you probably should be.”