

# Meet the team

An interview with David Jeffrey, Horticultural Leader at Communigrow. November 2020



**David Jeffrey took up a full-time position at Communigrow after being made redundant earlier this year. Reflecting on the past five months, the father-of-three, who has more than 50 years' experience in the horticultural sector says he feels "at home" working at the charity. David is very skilled and experienced and has been able to transfer his knowledge to those who volunteer to maintain the 3-acre site. He had previously served within a role in a prison – teaching inmates valuable life skills including how to grow and harvest their own crops.**

**David devotes his time to supporting Communigrow and keeping the field in shape. Here he shares what made him want to get involved with the charity and the positive work that he does to benefit the community.**

**His new career venture has enabled him to swap the confined prison setting to an office in the outdoors - surrounded by nature and tranquillity. The green-fingered enthusiast is calling on anyone who is interested in horticulture or those who are seeking an escape from the demands of life to sign up as a volunteer.**

## **When did you first become interested in growing vegetables?**

My first recollection of doing gardening was with my father - I must have been about six or seven at the time. We were growing tomatoes and he showed me how to sow the seed. When the tomatoes had grown, and I ate it for the first time – I noticed it had a totally different flavour to what I was expecting. When I worked in the prison, I wanted to inspire others to have that same experience growing something from almost nothing into a plant and reap the benefits of the lovely flavour you get afterwards.

## **What inspired you to join Communigrow?**

I have been at Communigrow for about five months and although I have only been here a little while, I feel really at home here. I encourage anyone who wants to learn about horticultural growing or just wants that space to give them time to think to volunteer. I was made redundant at the beginning of the year and that is the fifth time I have been made redundant in my work career. I know that there is always going to be something that I can do because of the skills that I have picked up over the years. Being here is brilliant, I almost feel as though I am semi-retired. I come to work, and I work in a field – this is my office! I have got plants and nature around me – it is great.

## **What impact has Communigrow had on mental wellbeing?**

As soon as you turn up to this field – it is peaceful. You are away from all the rat race that is out there. For me that is an important part of being in Communigrow, the place that it is. It helps others to think about where they are in life and what they want to do. We have schools that come here as well and the joy that you get from seeing children enjoying gardening and harvesting the vegetables that we grow here. I would like to have a Communigrow in every major town in Kent. It would be great if we could replicate this elsewhere in the county. I know the community is benefiting from what we are doing here.

**'Everything is about sustainability. We are looking after nature, so it looks after us'**



### ***How should prospective volunteers get in touch?***

We are always looking for volunteers and anyone can get in touch via our website, social media or by calling our telephone number. They do not have to have any experience in growing or gardening, they will learn that while they are here.

### ***What challenges have you faced over the last few months?***

We have had some local youths coming over the wall and damaging our pumpkins and winter squashes. It can be quite heart-breaking when you have put all your time and effort into growing produce, and someone comes along and smashes it up for a laugh. It has brought us closer together as a team as we have come up with ways to prevent this from happening. We have put up anti-climb paint on the wall, and everyone has had a go at doing this, so we can all feel like we are part of the solution.

### ***How is the workload distributed amongst the volunteers?***

I write a list of tasks that we have available over the upcoming months and hand it to Maria, our Volunteer Coordinator. She asks them what tasks they would like to get involved with and invites them to try something new. Volunteers can select a task they would like to do, and we give them the skills and training to enable to do it. It may be something they have never done before, and we give them the confidence to do it. Some volunteers come in with skills already, but I want to broaden their horizons on what they can do.



### ***What upcoming projects are you working on?***

We are currently building a log cabin for our volunteers so they have somewhere dry to change. We have just been given a small greenhouse and that is going to be put aside for melons and watermelons next year. The veg box scheme is working well, and we are getting a large intake of people who want to have fresh produce and know where it is grown. A lot of people who buy our veg boxes often walk their dogs along here, or go running, so they can see what we are doing all the time. Everything is about sustainability. We are looking after nature, so it looks after us.

### ***What do you enjoy the most about working here?***

Working with the team. There was an established team here when I joined, and we just got on so well. I have given the volunteers more responsibility and extra tasks that they may not have done before.

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