

Meet the team



An interview with Donna Sellick, one of our hard working volunteers



Back in November, we interviewed Donna, one of CommuniGrow's fantastic volunteers, who devotes her time to helping maintain the 2.4 acre site and diving head first into the charity's projects. Originally a chef, the story of where food comes from and the work behind it is of real importance to Donna. She loves making vegan cookies and cakes, which the team get to sample frequently!

Starting at the charity with several growing tasks, she has more recently started to support our educational activities, giving us a hand with Grow19 as well as our Home Education sessions. Did we also mention she is our top Facebook and Twitter follower?!

What inspired you to join CommuniGrow?

I suppose it was my love for gardening. But I'm also really into food. The sourcing of good, organic food is really important to me, so that was really the key factor. And I found myself with time, so I just thought it would be a good thing, and it's local! I can walk here, which is amazing.

How often do you come here?

I come twice a week, normally for three to four hours depending on what projects we're getting involved with. Then when I'm at home I'll do a little bit of research. I also follow all the social media platforms and try and share and contribute where I can, as I think that's really important.

And what sort of experience do you have of horticulture?

Really, it's home experience. I do also have a couple of horticultural qualifications because it was something I was particularly interested in and pursued it as a bit of a hobby.

But it hadn't been a career before?

No, my background is originally working as a chef, and then eventually moving into catering and contract catering. I worked with a lot of young people, so I hope there is the opportunity there to link my experience with the great work Naomi and Bonnie do with their home education sessions. I'm particularly interested in not only the growing but what we actually do with it once we've grown it. How can we use it, and how can we use it sustainably?

What have you enjoyed the most since joining?

I like the people. Meeting different people, having a conversation, being part of the conversation, working with like-minded people. Last week, there were so many things going on. We were focusing on one of the flower beds and getting it back into shape. The others were working on the cabin, some were painting and some putting things together, and it just had a really lovely buzz about it. There was a real feeling of being part of something. Very different I guess to what I've been used to.

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Absolutely, that sounds fantastic. Has there been anything specifically related to Covid that has been an added issue?

Being able to come somewhere out in the open, and feel safe, because you're not working in close quarters with people, where you can get the distance but still have that interaction, that's hugely important. As much as I love my husband, I like some time away from him! I'm sure he feels the same way! And then you come back, and you can tell stories about the people you've met and the things that they've done, and just having that capability to listen to other people's experiences is really nice.



Have you been able to develop any new skills while you've been here?

I don't think I've developed any new skills just yet, but I've got little bits of understanding. Just seeing how certain things are being planted and what we're planting seasonally as I've never been a great winter gardener as such! It's still early days and we're coming to the end of a quite prolific growing season and we're just trying to get everything ready for next year. So, the thought of next year is more exciting, it's something to look forward to, it's something to get out of bed for in the morning!

And are there things coming up over the next year that you're looking forward to being involved in? Or aspects of what Communigrow does that you're hoping to have a role in?

Any way that I can help and support, whether that's physically being a part of something or via social media, I like to look at what's going on and see what skills I've got and if there's any way I can use them to help really.

What sort of impact has being involved with Communigrow had on your mental health for example?

It's really positive. If I'd been staying at home on my own, as much as I can find things to do, it is quite isolating. Whereas actually if you come out and you can see other human beings it's just nice. If you've been a people person all your life, then that's taken away from you, it's something that you really miss.

Were you a people person when you were a chef?

Not when I was a chef but certainly when I moved into management. My whole life, and certainly the last ten years of it, has been about counselling people. Listening to people, nurturing people, helping people run, and when suddenly that stops you need to find a channel for it don't you? Well, you don't need to, but I need to find a channel for it.

And is Communigrow giving you the opportunity to share your own experience, your own skills, with other people?

Yes!

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Interview by Euan Philipps, words by Charley Pope