

Volunteers with learning difficulties

High Lodge, Thetford Forest

1. Protected Characteristic category

Disability

2. Partner organisations/participants

- Recreation in East of England in partnership with Friends of Thetford Forest (FOTF)
- [THERA](#), supporting people with a disability
- [Eve Personal Home Care](#)
- Friars Walk, Residential care home

3. Project title and details of Initiative

FOTF initiated the task to encourage volunteers to High Lodge; activities involved walking trail checks, meeting and greeting. The three partner organisations, who assist people with learning difficulties, declared an interest in the project and activities.

4. Initiative/Project aims and background

Volunteers from the three organisations attend High Lodge with the assistance of their support workers/carers and are met and guided on each visit by the Volunteer Manager or a Volunteer Co-ordinator. The main tasks carried out by the volunteers include:

- Horticultural work on the abandoned shrub and herb beds immediately outside High Lodge. This involves clearing, digging, composting, planting, adding bark chip, weeding, watering etc.

Good Practice case studies

- Autumn tasks – marking out the walking trail for the Electric Forest event by:
 - Maintaining the path of the sound trail and adding forest brash to the edges. Initially this was under the pine trees and was very indistinct when first created. The volunteers collected brash to lay at each side of the path in order to define it. In addition, they cleared the path of pine needles.
- Other tasks - keeping the patio area around High Lodge tidy.

The volunteers look forward to their visits, they develop personal skills and the tasks undertaken by the volunteers are of benefit to the FC and helps with maintaining the image and 'cared for' appearance of High Lodge.

A quote from one of the volunteer's carer – "John is always willing to come to High Lodge it gives him a sense of purpose and a good opportunity to enjoy the fresh air. He enjoys learning about nature and is keen to explore the forest by bike and hopefully see some of the wildlife. This idea has given him a new incentive and I intend to set this opportunity up as a reward for the work done. To give an example of his work John is also involved with keeping the area around the visitor centre tidy and has more recently been sweeping leaves from and levelling the sand in our new sand play area"



5. Future plans

Plans include the possible creation of a Sensory Garden, it is hoped people with disabilities will have an input into the design, creation and upkeep. Further links are being developed with an organisation that deals with 16-19 year olds who struggle with school/college/work situations and may be failing at school/college and coming out with no qualifications.