National Trust Partner with BeyondAutism to Create Inclusive Garden Project – steps towards employability

Wednesday 26 June, 2024

BeyondAutism is thrilled to announce a new collaborative effort with Morden Hall Park, a National Trust property, to create the BeyondAutism Garden – a project designed to provide autistic students with hands-on work experience. The official planting took place at the Garden Centre on Thursday 20th June, marking a significant milestone in this blossoming partnership between the charities.

The collaboration began in September 2023. Since then, students at BeyondAutism Post-19 have been visiting the park every Thursday for work experience, participating in various tasks such as path clearing, raking meadows, and planting. With only 21.7% of autistic adults in paid employment, this hands-on experience is crucial. Employers recognise that with the right advice and support, they can create a more inclusive workforce, making these opportunities invaluable for students' future employment prospects.

“It was great to meet the National Trust team and to witness their inclusive culture.” says Tracie Coultas-Pitman, BeyondAutism CEO. “Many of our students are not given the opportunity to experience work because the employer has reservations or worries. The BeyondAutism staff team do an amazing job of breaking down the barriers for and with our students; and our students work hard to achieve the employability skills they need. Whilst the experience is essential, the ultimate aim should always be paid work.”

Students began their work experience in a retail environment at the park’s Garden Centre where they priced items, stocked shelves, and helped with displays. Building on this experience, Molly McDermott, Community Ranger at the National Trust, identified two flower beds in need of attention. This provided the perfect opportunity for students to engage in an outdoor project from start to finish.

"[The students] work very hard and the staff who come each week too. Great characters! Very glad we have made this partnership." Molly, explained. “They should be very proud of themselves… The aim of the garden is to show the partnership we have with [BeyondAutism] and to show that everyone can achieve something no matter what barriers they face along the way. There will hopefully be a sense of achievement and ownership over this project.”

Following the initial planting, the plan is for students to continue maintaining the flower beds on a regular basis, ensuring the garden remains beautiful and vibrant for all those who visit throughout the year.

BeyondAutism and Morden Hall Park look forward to continuing their partnership and expanding opportunities for students at BeyondAutism Post-19.

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