

SCHOLARSHIP REPORT



HOST: OURganic Gardens, Community Gardens Ireland & Donegal Community Garden Network, Ireland

TRAINEE: Alexandra Fuss & Tom van Tilburg, Germany

Duration: 20.9.-6.10.2019

Report from HOST Joanne Butler, OURganic



Profile of the host organisation and local actors related to the organisation. ·

Started by owners Joanne and Milo Butler in 2009 OURganic Gardens is based in Gortahork , Co Donegal . Ireland . It has become an outdoor green space focused on food, sustainability, permaculture and horticulture.

OURganic Gardens currently provides educational courses, volunteer days , experience and training as well as community garden events and garden walks in NorthWest Donegal.

We strive to provide all walks of the community with a sense of ‘connection’ to where our food comes from, to encourage them to become environmentally aware, and to live more self-sufficiently.

Joanne has been involved in a number of community gardens all over Donegal since 2013 and she is currently involved with Donegal Community Garden Network and Community Gardens Ireland . She has a passion for growing community and growing food.

In the future we will continue to have planned workshops and events and the hope is that we will cater educational packages to provide people from all backgrounds and areas with the knowledge they need to make responsible decisions about how they live their lives, while surrounded by the beauty and wonder of the natural landscape OURganic Gardens has to offer.

Learning from an outside view describing the input or feedback the trainee is offering

When Tom and Alexandra initially contacted us they wanted to learn aspects in the following :

- keen to learn from others.
- Looking forward to practical work for example on a vegetable farm or orchard.
- knowledge related to agriculture and processing of products
- sharing ideas and knowledge.
- to learn more about fruit trees
- General hand on work on the farm

With all this in mind we developed a workplan to address all the interests that they had expressed.

Week 1

Introductions - food growing principles, how we designed the garden over ten years and how we are now designing the garden in line with the 12 permaculture principles

Looking at the organisational structure of OURganic Gardens - We are a small social enterprise running since 2013 , however we are only this year running the project from the one location , bring people to the gardens for workshops , training days and open tours.

At the end of this week we will be hosting an introduction to permaculture onsite so trainees will be involved in all aspects of hosting this event . (28th and 29th September)

We will schedule a national online meet up of all the community gardens involved in the running of CGI - to plan for the AGM (Date TBC)

Week 2

This week will be hands on in the garden working with the volunteers - participants come on a weekly basis for social and therapeutic horticulture so networking will be ongoing - As it will be autumn, we will be harvesting autumn fruit and making some produce from our harvest. We will make a start on the autumn pruning also if weather is favourable.

Further work in the garden and around the development of the social enterprise - we will look in-depth at the running's of the garden and the working, implementation, difficulties, advantages, that we face. There may be scope at the end of this week to meet up face to face with the National Group as their AGM is scheduled for early October. Dates TBA.

They will also get the opportunity to visit a walled garden in Northern Ireland as part of another permaculture group - Cultivate - who will be hosting a introduction to Permaculture in Derry . Joanne will be teaching on this .

Towards the end of the week we will work on the trainee report on all work covered on their time here. Joanne will work one on one overseeing the preparation of this and help with any difficulties encountered. We will use photographic, written and recorded media.

Short overall evaluation describing the output of the training. ·

When Tom and Alexandra arrived with us it was clear to see from the out set that they were very experienced and had a lot of knowledge in all aspects of growing food. This made us very excited as not only could we show them what we do but we could also learn from them and listen to their story of the trials and tribulations of growing food where they live.

On their very first day we took them on a walk of all the garden and forest area. We spoke about the Permaculture Principles we use in all aspects of our garden, our home and our daily lives. We outlined some of the work that would need to be done and began preparation on the week ahead.

As we were preparing for a permaculture course at the end of their first week it was important for us to plan and prepare the area for a large number of people arriving in six days' time. We also had to get all the elements ready that we will be teaching during the course. One of these elements is the lazy beds that we will be digging during the course as part of a 'Permacult' by the participants. For us to prepare this we had to do several trips to the beach to collect seaweed as our form of bulky manure. This was a great learning experience for Tom and Alexandra as they are not near the coast and have never used seaweed in their organic matter preparations.

On the Wednesday of the first week I took Tom and Alexandra to a new community garden initiative that was starting up through the Irish Men's Sheds group , my job was to assess the garden and give them recommendations on how to get the garden group up and running . Tom and Alexandra came along to this event and shared their story and experience to the garden group.

Towards the end of the week it was all hands-on deck to get the classrooms, garden and eating area ready for the arrival of our tutors and guests on the Saturday and Sunday.

I think both Tom and Alexandra excelled during this time as they fitted in well with the group and took part in all activities. They also were a great help in the garden as extra hands in the kitchen and the garden itself. This proved invaluable to us as they knew how to work in a dynamic environment.

The following week we attended an event from the Donegal Connect about bringing people into Donegal to reconnect with their families if they lived away or to come to Donegal as a place of work and the opportunities that lie within. Whether this is working for others or being self employed and working remotely throughout Ireland.

This gave the trainees a good insight into how the county plans to expand on rural sustainable enterprise in the coming years.

With more work being done around the garden this week and help on the vegetable stall, Tom and Alexandra also worked on their report and studied our previous business plans, our vision and over all aims of the business and social enterprise. I think all in all their learning was not only peer based but they also took some insights on the early formation of a bottom up approach to sustainable enterprise in Ireland.

We finished off the week with another introduction to permaculture that was run through Cultivate in Cloughjordan and held in Derry City Northern Ireland. This weekend was held at a new walled garden that wants all their staff and members to be aware of the permaculture principles and to use these principles going forward in their facilitations.

I hope the over all output of training was in line with the work both Tom and Alexandra did during their time at OURganic Gardens. The time frame was intense, and the workload matched this intensity. But I think they got out of this what was hopefully expected and hopefully it will have proved a great benefit to them both.

Recommendations.

For a short stay, spend your time wisely: Having Tom and Alexandra with us for only two weeks was a very short space of time. We tried to show them as much we could but didn't want to overwhelm them with too much in such a short period. We are a new start up social Enterprise, and we are still learning how to align with our mission. Taking the time with them explaining this gave us a chance to talk and exchange ideas about how we might improve in the future.

Be transparent: Tom and Alexandra were excellent trainees and asked lots of thought-provoking questions about our Enterprise and the relationships we have with other people involved. We tried to show her as much of the background, the set up and the implementation of OURganic Gardens to allow them both to reflect back on their learning here and use it as a valuable tool in the future .

We wish Tom and Alexandra all the best for their future and hope that their stay with us will give them a good step on their journey.

We look forward to seeing them again at the ERP !