

SCHOLARSHIP REPORT



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

TRAINEE: Tine Bielen, post-graduate in sustainable development, Belgium

Duration: 2.8.-7.9.2019

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 Tine initially contacted us she wanted to learn aspects in the following :

permaculture - organic growing - design and implementation, she did a PDC in Portugal last year

therapeutic and social horticulture - with her background as a podiatrist tine wanted to explore a combination of a therapeutic and a gardening project.

community gardens - tine was interested in a bottom-up and participatory approach, involving the community

the working of a social enterprise - with her back round in sustainable development, tine wanted to see a practical example and learn about its working, implementation, difficulties, advantages,....

sustainability/ sustainable lifestyle, resilience

eco education

a practical example of sustainable food -and agriculture

With all this in mind we developed a workplan to address all the interests that Tine has 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 , bringing people to the gardens for workshops , training days and open tours.

Week 2

A visit to local community garden projects - Joanne is involved in a lot of community gardens in Donegal and current Chairperson of Community Gardens Ireland - during this week we will visit some local community gardens and look at the organisational structures of them and CGI .

We will schedule a national online meet up of all the community gardens involved in the running of CGI

Week 3

This week will be hands on in the garden working with the volunteers and social farming group - participants come on a weekly basis for social and therapeutic horticulture so networking will be ongoing - however we will plan a meet up specifically to introduce our trainee at this time

Week 4

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 in planning a festival where Community Gardens Ireland are organising.

Week 5

This week will see 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. ·

From the beginning it was clear to us that Tine would be a perfect match for our project and for us to host her in line with European Network Forum Synergies to help trainees find a rural organisation related to sustainable local & rural development.

Since our first contact via email Tine came across as someone who had similar interests and was someone with values and ethics that aligned with our organisation.

Having had Tine with us as our first trainee with Forum Synergies we can really say it was a wonderful experience. From our first contact with her we felt an instant connection as to our backgrounds, interest and experience . Tine was very interested in permaculture and sustainability and this in return was something that we were keen to explore with a trainee . The symbiotic relationship to work with trainees to teach and also learn from .

During her time spent with us we looked at all elements of sustainable living in Donegal, Ireland. As a rural county in Ireland and at the NW edge of Europe we feel we want to highlight the opportunities that can exist as a Social Enterprise in Ireland. Not only could we show Tine our work in the garden but having her stay with us and the family allowed her to see insights into the business and how I work with other groups and projects outside of the garden . This model of self-employment in turn allows me to develop my idea from home while still engaging with likeminded people from all walks of horticulture , permaculture and environmental backgrounds .

Recommendations.

Be flexible: From the start we tried to follow our schedule day by day but as we got future into Tine's time with us we were able to move days to suit the weather, family and travel . This allowed us to fully cover her interests during her stay.

Take time: Having a trainee with is a long period allowed us to have lots of interesting conversations about where we were going and how truly sustainable our business model is. We are a new start up social Enterprise, and we are still learning how to align with our mission. Taking the time with Tine explaining this gave us a chance to talk and exchange ideas about how we might improve in the future.

Be transparent: Tine was an excellent trainee and asked lots of thought provoking questions about our Enterprise and the relationships we have with other people involved . It was clear from the outset that Tine wanted to follow with a similar project in the future so we tried to show her as much of the background , the set up and the implementation of OURganic Gardens to allow her to hopefully one day do something similar .

We wish Tine all the best for the future and hope that her stay with us will give her a good step on her journey.